

# 1 Corinthians Chapters 2 and 3, Verse by Verse

## by Karl Kemp; September, 2015

All quotations were taken from the New American Standard Bible, 1995 edition, unless otherwise noted. Sometimes I make comments in the middle of quotations using brackets [ ] or [[ ]] to make them more obvious. I am using straight quotation marks ("), hyphens (-) instead of dashes, and a few other things like this because some of the internet sites where I post these articles require it. Also they don't allow footnotes. Cf., e.g., means "compare, for example."

**1 CORINTHIANS 2:1. "And when I came to you, brethren, I did not come with superiority of speech or of wisdom** [[On worldly, human, fleshly/carnal wisdom, which has a strong demonic input, which is contrasted with the wisdom of God which is true wisdom, see, for example, 1 Cor. 1:17-31 and 2:2-16. The apostle Paul did share God's true wisdom with those who would/could receive it.]], **proclaiming to you the testimony of God** [[Or, "the mystery of God" (see 2:7). The "United Bible Societies' Greek New Testament," fourth revised edition, favors the Greek reading for "mystery," instead of "testimony," with a B rating, which means that the editors are almost certain. With either translation, the apostle Paul was proclaiming the gospel of new-covenant salvation in Christ Jesus, which he received by revelation from God. That was quite a message (very good news) to bring to Corinth! The Corinthians (and all of us) need God's pure Word, not an admixture of things of the flesh. God's Word doesn't need any embellishment, which would detract from its glory.

I prefer the reading "mystery of God." The "mystery" is the gospel that centers in the Lord Jesus Christ (cf. Col. 2:2) and His all-important atoning death (cf. 1 Cor. 2:2, 7-9). It is called a mystery in that it was hidden in God but has now been revealed through the apostle Paul in significant detail, including God's plan to fully include the Gentiles in His salvation plans. I could live with the translation "the testimony of God." Paul was proclaiming the gospel that God revealed to him. Therefore God had testified to the authenticity and truthfulness of the gospel that Paul had brought to Corinth. There was no other message that could save Jews or Gentiles.

I'll quote 1 Cor. 1:17, "For Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel, not in cleverness of speech [more literally, "not in wisdom of the word," referring in context to worldly, fleshly, carnal, demonic wisdom], so that the cross of Christ would not be made void." It is clear, based on what the apostle Paul says in his epistles, that he had a high view of water baptism, but he was against fleshly Christians at Corinth (or

anywhere else) boasting in the fact that they had been baptized by the apostle Paul (see 1 Cor. 1:10-17).

The apostle Paul knew that the Greeks (Corinth was a Greek city) were proud of their "superiority of speech" (1 Cor. 2:1; rhetoric) and worldly "wisdom" (cf., e.g., 1 Cor. 1:17-31). The Greeks were proud of their rhetoricians and philosophers. (The word "philosophy" is from the Greek and means "love of wisdom.") He went out of his way to give them the wisdom of God that centers in the gospel of new-covenant salvation in the Lord Jesus Christ separated from the things of the flesh. He knew that the things of the flesh (very much including worldly wisdom, worldly philosophy, or being an expert at worldly, persuasive, polished speaking [rhetoric]) could not save them, or help save them.

Those things could not save them, but they confuse the issue. The more we focus on things of the flesh, the more we will miss the essential things, the things that deal with God and His new-covenant plan of salvation. The Corinthians (and all people) needed to hear the true gospel, understand it, repent and take it into their hearts by faith, be forgiven, be born again by the Spirit of God, and begin to live for God in His truth, righteousness and holiness by the enabling grace of God in Christ by faith (faith in God and the gospel), which includes walking by the Spirit of God on a continuous basis.

To the extent we walk in the flesh, instead of walking in line with the Word of God and by the Spirit of God on a continuous basis by faith, we will continue to live in sin. We are required to walk by the Spirit of God on a continuous basis, by faith, so that we will not do the sinful desires/works of the flesh (cf., e.g., Gal. 5:16, 19-21). It is rather easy for born-again Christians to be fleshly (to walk in the flesh to some extent). Many of the Corinthian Christians demonstrated that. But the apostle Paul made it clear that that way of living is totally unacceptable. It is a serious perversion of the gospel, and it is a dangerous way to live. In Gal. 5:19-21, for example, Paul made it clear that "Christians" who continue to do the works of the flesh (all sin are works of the flesh by Paul's definition of the flesh) will not inherit the kingdom of God (heaven).]] **(2) For I determined to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified.** [[Compare 1 Cor. 1:23. The message of the cross sounds weak (it sounds like defeat) until we understand it. For one thing, the apostle Paul also spoke of the resurrection and ascension of the Lord Jesus, of His present ministry at the Father's right hand, and of His coming again to save His people and judge the world, of all the work of the Holy Spirit, etc. He taught all of these things at Corinth, but he emphasized the fact that we must be humble (which is the opposite the fleshly pride of man) and submitted to God, His Word, and His Spirit, and that most of the glory of our salvation is reserved for the future, when the Lord Jesus returns.

The apostle limited himself to the fullest extent possible to the foundational truths of the gospel presented in a simple, humble, but quite effective manner that was backed up by the infinite Holy Spirit. For one thing, unlike the boasting ways of the world, Paul gave the Corinthian Christians only one thing to boast in, namely God (the triune God), the God of creation and the God of new-covenant salvation, which makes us new creations. I'll quote 1 Cor. 1:29-31, "so that no man may boast before God. (31) But by His doing you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom [true wisdom] from God, and righteousness and sanctification [I prefer the translation "holiness"], and redemption, (31) so that just as it is written, 'Let him who boasts, boast in the Lord [cf. Jer. 9:23, 24].'" **(3) I was with you in weakness** [cf. 1 Cor. 4:10; 2 Cor. 11:30 with 2 Cor. 11:1-12:13; and 13:9] **and fear and in much trembling** [[For one thing, the attitude and demeanor of Paul was to be contrasted with the attitude and demeanor of some proud, arrogant, bombastic Greek leaders, including some who were "Christian" leaders at Corinth. Christians SHOULD manifest fear and trembling when it comes to being afraid to sin against God or to be unfaithful to Him in our lives and ministries (cf., e.g., Matt. 10:28; Luke 1:50; 12:5; 2 Cor. 7:1; Eph. 5:21; 6:5; Phil. 2:12; 1 Pet. 1:17; 2:17). I'll quote 2 CORINTHIANS 7:1, "Therefore, having these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all defilement of flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God."

The apostle Paul was not weak when it came to being faithful to God by His sufficient grace and effectively fulfilling his ministry, which included his accurately presenting the truth of the gospel "in demonstration of the Spirit and of power" (2:4). The apostle walked by faith and by the Holy Spirit and was faithful to God by His grace through faith. When Paul was "weak" in the things of the flesh (he did not rely on things of the flesh; he did not look good when it came to things of the flesh), the power of God could be manifested to the max through him (cf., e.g., 2 Cor. 12:7-10; 10:1-6). We should also undoubtedly include the idea that Paul was very much aware of the awesome responsibility he carried as the apostle to the Gentiles and of the opposition of the devil and those who follow him; fleshy Christians are influenced by the devil.

Paul was criticized by some at Corinth for his appearance and his speaking (cf., e.g., 2 Cor. 10:10; 11:6); he didn't try to compete with some of the Greeks in things of the flesh. We must see that Paul's "weakness" helped his converts focus on God and His salvation. God must receive all the glory, not His spokesmen. Even with Paul's "weakness," some Christians who were fleshly boasted in Paul in a way that hurt the Body of Christ (cf. 1 Cor. 1:10-17; 3:3-9, 21-23; 4:1, 6).], **(4) and my message and my preaching were not in persuasive words of [worldly] wisdom** [cf., e.g., 1 Cor. 1:17 ("...but to preach the gospel, not in cleverness of speech [literally "wisdom of speech"]..."); 2:1, 13], **but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power** [[Compare

Rom. 15:19. This "demonstration of the Spirit and of power" included the working of miracles, but even more important, it included God's transforming spiritually dead people who were in bondage to sin into born-again servants of God and His truth, righteousness (which includes humility), and holiness.], **(5) so that your faith would not rest on the wisdom of men, but on the power of God** [the power of God that comes with the wisdom of God]. [[Compare 2 Cor. 4:7; 6:7; and 12:9, 10. The only thing in the universe that could save them was the wisdom of God contained in the gospel of the new covenant, which is backed up by the Spirit of God, who indwells all true Christians. Those who submit to the gospel by faith and walk by faith and by the Holy Spirit on a continuous basis are forgiven, redeemed, and enabled to walk in the truth, righteousness and holiness of God, with the victory over sin, all sin (cf. 1 Cor. 1:30, 31) and will be ready to stand before God at the end of this age. Forgiveness for the sins of Christians when they repent is also provided through the all-important atoning death of the Lamb of God. And when Christians understand and walk in line with the gospel that the apostle proclaimed, by grace through faith, they give God all of the glory, as it must be. Pride with unbelief is at the root of the sin problem.]] **(6) Yet we** [[(This double bracket goes on for four paragraphs.) The "we" here and in verse 7 refers especially to the apostle Paul (note that he switches to "I" in 3:1-4), but Sosthenes (1 Cor. 1:1), Timothy (2 Cor. 1:1), and others who learned from Paul and ministered with him are apparently included, and in a fuller sense the other apostles could be included (cf. 1 Cor. 15:9-11). It is very important to see that Paul went out of his way in 1 Cor. 2:6, 7, 10-13, 16 to distinguish between himself (along with the others included in the "we") and the Corinthian Christians when he used the pronouns "we" and "us" and that he made the same distinction between himself and the Corinthian Christians using "I" in 3:1-4. (The second "we" and the "us" in 2:12 are applicable for all true Christians, even as the word "our" is applicable to all true Christians in 2:7.)

For one thing, there was a distinction between Paul and the Corinthian Christians because Paul had received the gospel by revelation which he shared with those at Corinth and everywhere else God sent him. But it is also important to see that Paul emphasized the distinction between himself and the Christians at Corinth because of the fleshiness of so many of the Christians at Corinth. He made the point that their fleshiness limited the wisdom that he could communicate to them. Some of the Corinthian Christians were spiritual, by the Spirit, but Paul doesn't make that important point in 2:6-3:4.

Significantly, the apostle was strongly insulting them (in love) in an attempt to wake them up (especially see 2:14 and 3:1-4); for one thing, he somewhat overstated the fleshiness (they were not spiritual by the Spirit) of most of the Christians at Corinth, but the problem was quite serious. The apostle repeatedly rebuked and often insulted the

Corinthian Christians throughout 1 and 2 Corinthians ((along with 1 Cor. 2:14; 3:1-4; cf., e.g., 1 Cor. 4:3-21; 5:1-13; 6:1-20; 8:1-13; 10:6-22; 11:3-10, 17-34; 14:12, 36-38, 40; and 15:12-19, 33, 34, 36; and 2 Cor. 5:20-6:2; 6:11-7:1, 8-11; 10:1-11; 11:1-13:10, especially 11:3, 4, 19, 20; 12:11-13, 16; and 13:2-5, 10)), but he also strongly encouraged them too throughout those epistles (cf., e.g., 1 Cor. 1:1-9; 3:16, 17, 22, 23; 10:13; 15:50-58; and 2 Cor. 1:1-3; 4:13-15; 7:2-16; 8:7, 8; and 13:14). And those who were walking in the truth, righteousness and holiness of God would have understood that the rebukes and insults (which included biting sarcasm) were not aimed at them.

The more that fleshly Christians are fleshly (which is the opposite of being spiritual by the Spirit), the more they are not interested in, not able to understand, or not aware of the fact that they do not have much of God's true wisdom. (It is dangerous for Christians to be fleshly. Christians are called, enabled, and required to walk by the Spirit on a continuous basis by faith.) As the apostle will make clear as we continue, many of the Corinthian Christians were far from being spiritual, far from walking by the Spirit on a continuous basis. As it often happens, many of them thought they were spiritual, which made their condition all the more serious, but they weren't. For one thing, it takes more than genuine spiritual gifts to make Christians spiritual (see 1 Corinthians chapters 12-14; these chapters are discussed in a paper on my internet site). Also there are demonic counterfeits for the spiritual gifts, but Paul didn't accuse them of that problem in this epistle, he did, however, accuse them of listening to false apostles, which is a super-serious problem (see 2 Corinthians chapter 11).] **do speak wisdom** [[Paul is not speaking of worldly wisdom here. He is speaking of God's true wisdom that centers in the glory of His new-covenant plan of salvation, which includes the overthrow and removal of all His enemies, very much including Satan and all who follow him, through the Lord Jesus Christ and the glorious things He has prepared for those who Him (cf., e.g., 1 Cor. 2:9, 12). We will discuss this wisdom further under verse 7.]] **among those who are mature** [[(This double bracket goes on for four paragraphs.) I believe the translation "**perfect**" (with the KJV), instead of "mature" better communicates Paul's intended meaning for the Greek adjective "teleios" here. (Sometimes the translation "complete" works well.) Paul clearly was not speaking of Christians having *absolute* perfection (absolute perfection is reserved for the age to come, where we will be glorified, including having glorified bodies). He was speaking of a *relative* perfection. Christians (including those who are young in the faith) who walk in the truth, righteousness, and holiness of God by the saving grace of God in Christ, which includes all the work of the indwelling Holy Spirit, by faith, are relatively perfect (spiritual). (It is significant that Eph. 4:24 informs us that the truth of God includes His righteousness and holiness; compare James 3:17 regarding wisdom.) All Christians are called and enabled to walk in this relative perfection, which is the equivalent of walking in an abiding state of holiness.

The words "he who is spiritual" of 2:15, the word "spiritual men" in 3:1, and the words at the end of 2:13, which should be translated "to spiritual men," or the equivalent, carry the same meaning as the words "those who are perfect" here in 2:6. Christians who walk by the Holy Spirit on a continuous basis are "spiritual," and, as Gal. 5:16 shows, they do not carry out the sinful desire of the flesh; in other words they do not do the sinful works of the flesh (Gal. 5:19-21). They are not fleshly; they don't sin; if they should commit occasional acts of sin they will be forgiven when they repent (1 John 2:1, 2); in the ideal case they don't sin at all. (You can read about various sins of some of the Corinthian Christians throughout 1 Corinthians and to a lesser extent in 2 Corinthians.) Some other verses that use "teleios" in a comparable way (of relative perfection) are Phil. 3:15; Col. 1: 28 (this verse has some application for the present state, but is looking to the future when we will stand before God); 4:12; and James 3:2 (cf. Matt. 5:48; Rom. 12:1, 2).

Those who are relatively "perfect" and "spiritual" by the grace of God in Christ, by faith, with a strong emphasis on the work of the Spirit who indwells all true Christians, are contrasted in this passage with those who are called "the natural man" in 2:14 (I prefer "unspiritual," instead of "natural," as in the margin of the NASB; see under 2:14); who are called "men of flesh" and "infants in Christ" in 3:1 and "still fleshly" and "walking like mere men" in 3:3). All five expressions have essentially the same meaning here: they were not walking by the Spirit on a consistent basis (which went along with the fact that they were not walking in line with the Word of God, by grace through faith), which was a very serious problem.

Paul intended all five of these expressions to refer, in an insulting way, to large numbers of the Corinthian Christians. As I mentioned, I believe we must see that Paul went out of his way (in love) to insult those who needed to be insulted in an attempt to wake them up; for one thing, he somewhat overstated the non-spirituality of most of the Christians at Corinth, but the problem was quite serious. See under these verses below for more details.]] **a wisdom, however, not of this age nor of the rulers of this age, who are passing away** [On "the rulers of this age," see under verse 8.]; **(7) but we speak God's wisdom in a mystery, the hidden *wisdom* which God predestined before the ages to our** [The pronoun "our" applies to all true Christians.] **glory** [[(This double bracket goes on for three paragraphs.) Most of the glory of our salvation is reserved for the future, when we will be glorified (cf., e.g., Rom. 5:2; 8:17, 18, 21; Col. 1:27; 3:4; and 1 Pet. 5:1, 4, 10). The word "mystery" goes with the fact that God had kept hidden (cf. Col. 1:26), for the most part, His plan of salvation that centers in the incarnation and sacrifice of His unique Son. Now it was being revealed through the apostle Paul (and others). I'll quote 1 Cor. 1:23, 24, "but we preach Christ crucified, to Jews a stumbling

block and to Gentiles foolishness, but to those who are the called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God." And Col. 2:2b, 3, "*resulting in* a true knowledge of God's mystery, *that is*, Christ *Himself*, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge." God chose to reveal a large part of that mystery through the apostle Paul ((cf. Rom. 16:25, 26; Gal. 1:11, 12; Eph. 1:3-14; 3:1-13 (Paul emphasized the super-important point [as far as we Gentiles are concerned] that the mystery includes the fact that Gentiles are fully included in God's new-covenant salvation plans); 5:25-33; 6:19; Col. 1:26, 27; and Romans chapters 9-11, including that part of the "mystery" that Paul mentioned in Rom. 11:25-27: that the end-time remnant of Israel will be saved at the end of this age)). In Rev. 10:7 "the mystery of God is finished" under the sounding of the seventh and last trumpet of the book of Revelation (Rev. 11:15), not when the angel begins to sound his trumpet. (See Article 21 in my e-book, "Introduction to the Mid-Week Rapture," for one place.) The "mystery" of God includes His saving and His judging at the end of this age.

Through the plans of God contained in the mystery that have now been revealed (been revealed at least for the most part), God will save, with a very full salvation (that includes being glorified) all who submit to Him in faith. This includes Gentiles; part of the mystery revealed through the apostle Paul was that believing Gentiles would be grafted into, and become part of, God's true Israel (e.g., Rom. 11:17-24). It also includes the remnant of the people of Israel who will be saved in the last days; this was also revealed by the apostle Paul (e.g., Rom. 11:25-27), but it was also prophesied in the Old Testament. And it includes all the believers from the days of the Old Testament. The plans of God contained in the mystery also include the details on His overpowering and totally removing the devil and all who follow him from His kingdom forever.

The devil had fallen and a third of God's angels followed him in his rebellion before man was created, and then man joined in the rebellion. That was a BIG problem! But God totally solves that problem through His Son, and we (all believers) will be reigning with Him in His end-time judgment from the time we are glorified and raptured (cf., e.g., Gen. 3:15; Rom. 16:20; 1 Cor. 6:2, 3; 15:24-26; Rev. 2:26, 27; 5:10; 12:5; 17:14; 19:14, 19; 20:6; and 20:5). What a plan! Before the world was created God "predestined" (laid out the path beforehand) these things for "our glory" (cf., e.g., Acts 4:28; Rom. 8:28-30; Eph. 1:3-14, especially verses 5, 11. We will be glorified, including having glorified bodies, and even reign with God the Father and His Son in a never ending reign (cf. Rev. 22:5).)]; **(8) the wisdom which none of the rulers of this age** [[The "rulers of this age" includes the rulers in the spiritual dimension, starting with Satan, along with the human rulers of this age, who are strongly influenced by the spiritual rulers. The apostle Paul understood that our primary warfare is against Satan and the rulers in the spiritual dimension (cf., e.g., John 12:31; 14:12; 16:11; 1 John 5:19; Eph. 2:2; 6:12; 2 Cor. 4:4).

And the rulers in the spiritual dimension were very involved with the crucifixion of the Lamb of God (cf., e.g., Luke 22:3-6; John 13:2, 21-30). They have been attacking God's people (many of those attacks were carried out through human rulers) throughout the history of mankind to the extent God permitted, and especially those who were the greatest threat to them. The "wisdom" spoken of here includes the things spoken of in the next verse.]] **has understood; for if they had understood it they would not have crucified the Lord of glory** [[If God had not kept His salvation plans hidden (see verse 7; cf. Col. 1:26), the "rulers of this age" would have understood that the crucifixion of the Lamb of God was the primary thing that God would use to overthrow sin and Satan and his entire kingdom of darkness and at the same time bring about the salvation of all believers (cf., e.g., John 12:31; 16:11; Eph. 1:20-22; Col. 2:14, 15; Heb. 2:14, 15).]]; **(9) but just as it is written, 'THINGS WHICH EYE HAS NOT SEEN AND EAR HAS NOT HEARD, AND WHICH HAVE NOT ENTERED THE HEART OF MAN, ALL THAT GOD HAS PREPARED FOR THOSE WHO LOVE HIM** [[The NASB, in a marginal note, refers to Isa. 64:4 and 65:17 as the source for this "quotation." Some of the glory of our salvation is available to us now, but most of the glory is reserved for the future, which will start when the Lord Jesus returns and we are glorified and begin to reign with Him. It is very important for us to have a solid hope of the glory that God has prepared for those who love Him (cf., e.g., Col. 1:5, 27; Titus 3:7). This hope (hope refers to the future, but there is no suggestion of doubting, like there is when we typically use the word hope in English: I hope it won't rain) will help us stay strong in faith with a heart of thanksgiving as we endure the trials that come to us (Christians) during this present age (cf., e.g., Rom. 8:16-18).]].' **(10) For to us** [It is important to see that Paul was not including the Corinthian Christians in this "us"; see under verses 6 and 12, and see verse 13.]] **God revealed *them* through the Spirit; for the Spirit searches all things, even the depths of God. (11) For who among men knows the *thoughts* of a man except the spirit of the man which is in him? [Compare Prov. 20:27.] Even so the *thoughts* of God no one knows except the Spirit of God.** [[The Spirit of God revealed the gospel to the apostle Paul, and the apostle Paul, as God's spokesman, shared the gospel with the Corinthians. THE APOSTLE PAUL IS THE SPOKESMAN IN THE SPOTLIGHT HERE. These revelations are included in the Bible. God doesn't reveal the gospel to each of us individually, but He enables us as individuals to understand God's Word and to live it.]] **(12) Now we have received** [[[This double bracket continues for three paragraphs.) I'll quote the first paragraph that I have under 2:6: The "we" here and in verse 7 refers especially to the apostle Paul (note that he switches to "I" in 3:1-4), but Sosthenes (1 Cor. 1:1), Timothy (2 Cor. 1:1), and others who learned from Paul and ministered with him are apparently included, and in a fuller sense the other apostles could be included (cf. 1 Cor. 15:9-11). It is very important to see that Paul went out of his way in 1 Cor. 2:6, 7, 10-13, and 16 to distinguish between himself (along with the others included in the "we") and the Corinthian Christians when



he used the pronouns "we" and "us" and that he made the same distinction between himself and the Corinthian Christians using "I" in 3:1-4. (The second "we" and the "us" in 2:12 are applicable for all true Christians, even as the word "our" is applicable to all true Christians in 2:7.) For one thing, there was a significant distinction between Paul and the Corinthian Christians because the apostle Paul had received the gospel by revelation (Gal. 1:11, 12, for example), which he shared with those at Corinth and everywhere else God sent him. But it is also important to see that Paul emphasized the distinction between himself and the Christians at Corinth because of the fleshiness of so many of the Christians at Corinth. Some of the Corinthian Christians were spiritual, by the Spirit, but Paul doesn't make that important point in 2:6-3:4.

I'll quote two sentences from what John MacArthur says under verses 12 and 13 ("1 Corinthians" [Moody Bible Institute, 1984], page 63): "The 'we's' and the 'us' of verses 12-13 (as in verses 6-7, 10) do not refer to Christians in general but to Paul himself. God's word is for all believers, but was 'revealed' only to the apostles and the other writers of Scripture."

I'll also quote a few sentences from what Bruce Winter says under verses 6-16 ("New Bible Commentary, 21<sup>st</sup> Century Edition" [Inter-Varsity Press, 1994], page 1165): "God has been pleased to reveal His wisdom through His Spirit to the apostles, 'to us,' (2:10). The 'we' referred to in verses 6, 7, 13, and 16 does not refer to the Corinthian Christians.... Nor does it refer to the Christians in general but rather to the unique ministry of the apostles." The apostle Paul was chosen to be the "apostle to the Gentiles" (Rom. 11:13 [NIV, KJV, NKJV]; cf. Acts 9:15; Gal. 1:16; 2:7, 8; Eph. 3:1-13, and he received special revelation dealing with that topic and dealing with some other topics too.], **not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God** [the Holy Spirit], **so that we may know the things freely given to us** [[The things are freely given to all true Christians, to all "those who love Him" of 2:9, but many true Christians do not receive nearly all that is available to us during this age. This is a significant problem!]] **by God, (13) which things we** [the apostle Paul (and others); see 2:6, 7, 10, 13; not including the Christians at Corinth] **also speak, not in words taught by human wisdom** [The apostle repeatedly makes the point in the first two chapters of 1 Corinthians that we need God's wisdom, and that we must avoid worldly, human, demonic wisdom.], **but in those taught by the Spirit, combining spiritual thoughts with spiritual words.** [[I cannot live with this translation of the NASB for the last few words of this verse. A translation like the marginal note in the NASB is required, "Or, 'interpreting spiritual things for spiritual men.' " I strongly prefer "explaining spiritual things [the things revealed to Paul by the Spirit] to spiritual men [people]." Paul goes on in 3:1 to say that he "could not speak to [the Christians at Corinth] as spiritual men," even though they were born again. The same Greek adjective "pneumatikos" in the

masculine, dative, plural form that I would translate "to spiritual men [people]" here in 2:13 is used in 3:1 ("to spiritual men [people]"), and the same adjective is used in the singular in 2:15 ("he who is spiritual").

I'll quote the last words of 2:13 from several other translations: "explaining spiritual things to those who are spiritual" (J. B. Phillips); "explaining spiritual things to spiritual men" ("Epistles of Paul" by Conybeare); "interpreting spiritual things to those who are spiritual" (NRSV); "interpreting spiritual things to spiritual men" (American Bible Union Version). Some, including the NEB, translate the last words "to those who have the Spirit," but that translation won't work here, because the problem wasn't that the Corinthian Christians didn't have the Spirit (they were born-again Christians, and the charismatic gifts were manifested among them [cf. 1 Cor. 1:7 and chapters 12-14]), but that they weren't walking by the Spirit in an adequate way on a consistent basis - they were fleshly, which is a very serious problem. (See 2:14 and 3:1-4.))] **(14) But a natural man** [(This double bracket goes on for six paragraphs.) The translation "natural" man for the Greek adjective "psuchikos" would be quite acceptable here if Paul were limiting the people he was speaking about to unbelievers. But since he wrote these words, in an insulting way with the born-again Corinthian Christians in mind, that translation doesn't work here. The translation "soulish" would work OK, with the understanding that "soulish" is being used in contrast with "spiritual" by the Holy Spirit.

It would be possible to understand Paul to be speaking only of unbelievers here, and most (but not nearly all) of the commentators I have looked at understand this verse that way, but I am confident that Paul intended to include the large number of "fleshy" Christians at Corinth here (in fact, the fleshy Christians are in the spotlight here) who were "walking like mere men [like unbelievers]" (1 Cor. 3:4). For one thing, it makes Paul's strong insult stronger (which I believe he intended), and this understanding fits verses 15 and 16 perfectly.

It seems that the translation that best fits Paul's intended meaning here in verse 14 is "unspiritual." In 2:13-3:4 the apostle is contrasting the "unspiritual" person with the one who is "spiritual" by the Spirit. (The spiritual Christian is the equivalent of the "perfect" Christian of 2:6.) Paul uses "spiritual" (Greek adjective "pneumatikos") in 2:13, 15, and 3:1 to show what is required of all Christians and will be manifested by all Christians who walk by faith (faith in God and His Word) and by the Holy Spirit on a continuous basis. The only way we can be spiritual (in the sense the apostle Paul is using the word in this passage) is by walking by the Holy Spirit on a continuous basis, in line with the Word of God, by grace through faith.

I'll list some translations that have "unspiritual" for "psuchikos" here in 2:14: In the margin the NASB has a note: "Or, 'an unspiritual [man].'" The J. B. Phillips translation; Jerusalem Bible; RSV; NRSV; NEB; and the Williams translation have "unspiritual"; so too does Simon Kistemaker in his commentary on 1 Corinthians; the Amplified Bible in its typical amplified sense has "natural, nonspiritual." The NIV has "the man without the Spirit." The problem with this translation is that Paul would not (could not) say that the born-again Christians at Corinth were without the Spirit, but that they were not walking on a consistent basis by the Spirit. (The translators of the NIV were assuming, like so many Christian scholars do, wrongly I believe, that the apostle was speaking only of unbelievers with the adjective "psuchikos" in 2:14.) Referring to the same people in 3:1, Paul called them "men of flesh [fleshy]" and "infants in Christ" and in 3:3 he said that they were "still fleshly" and "walking like mere men," even though they had been called and enabled to be spiritual by walking by the Spirit on a continuous basis.

IT IS IMPORTANT TO SEE THAT THE FIVE DESCRIPTIONS: "unspiritual" of 2:14, "men of flesh" and "infants in Christ" of 3:1, and "fleshy" and "walking like mere men" of 3:3 ALL REFER TO THE SAME PEOPLE, THAT THEY HAVE ESSENTIALLY THE SAME MEANING, AND THAT THEY ARE ALL STRONGLY CONTRASTED WITH the "spiritual" BY THE SPIRIT OF 2:13, 15 and 3:1. (As I mentioned "psuchikos" in 2:14 also includes unbelievers.)

I'll quote part of what A. Robertson and A. Plummer say under 1 Cor. 2:6 ("Epistle of St Paul to the Corinthians" [T & T Clark, 1921, printed in 1983], page 36): "On the one hand, there are the 'teleioi' ["perfect"; in 2:6; these "oi" endings are plural endings in the Greek], whom he calls lower down [in this writing] 'pneumatikoi' ["spiritual"] (2:13, 15, and 3:1); on the other hand, there is the anomalous [abnormal; it ought not be true for Christians] class of 'sarkinoi' [translated "men of flesh"], who are babes in Christ [on "babes in Christ" see at the end of 3:1]. Ideally, all Christians, as such, are 'pneumatikoi' [spiritual] (...Gal. 3:2, 5; Rom. 8:9, 15, 26). But practically, many Christians need to be treated 'as' (on the word 'as,' Greek 'os,' see 3:1), and to all intents are, 'sarkinoi' [translated "men of flesh" by the NASB in 3:1], 'nepioi' [babes/infants], 'psuchikoi' [unspiritual], even 'sarkikoi' (3:3) [translated "fleshly" by the NASB]. The work of the Apostle has as its aim the raising of all imperfect Christians to the normal and ideal standard...." Under 2:14 (page 49) these authors say: "The word ["psuchikos"] is thus practically another name for the 'sarkikos' (3:1-3)."] **does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually** [[Greek adverb "pneumatikos" (with the letter "o" being a long o in the Greek, an omega) was derived from the adjective "pneumatikos" (which has the short o, an omicron, in the Greek). This adverb is only used here and in Rev. 11:8 (translated "mystically" by the NASB).]] **appraised** [or, discerned, or the

equivalent; Greek verb "anakrino"]. [[Those who are unspiritual cannot understand, or appraise, or discern the things of the Spirit of God. Paul is telling the Christians at Corinth, in an intended very insulting, somewhat overstated way, that this is why he couldn't share much godly wisdom with them. He is also setting the stage to say in verses 15 and 16 that the fleshly, unspiritual Christians at Corinth don't have any legitimate basis to judge him (Paul), which some of them had been doing.

The commentator F. Godet comments that "Paul would not apply to true believers such strong expressions as those of our verse [referring to 2:14]: 'The things of the Spirit are foolishness unto them.' " I believe the apostle used such strong expressions to intensify his insults that were designed (in love) to wake them up from their serious fleshiness, etc. Hopefully he would get their attention. I need to make it clear that even if Paul was referring only to unbelievers here in 2:14, which I very strongly doubt, he clearly very strongly insulted the Christians at Corinth in 3:1-4 (and other places in 1 and 2 Corinthians).]] **(15) But he who is spiritual** [Greek adjective "pneumatikos," which was used in the plural 2:13; 3:1, but here in verse 15 it is singular, masculine] **appraises** [[The same verb "anakrino" was used in verse 14; here in verse 15 it could also be translated "makes judgments about" (NIV), or "judges" (NKJV), or the equivalent. And the same verb will be used again at the end of verse 15.]] **all things** [[In this context "all things" is limited to things like understanding the truth of the gospel, who is spiritual or unspiritual, what does God require of us (including things like humility, walking in love, and the need for unity in the Body of Christ), what is righteous and what is sinful, and what about the future? These things had been revealed to the apostle Paul and he walked by faith and by the Holy Spirit. The Corinthian Christians were not spiritual by the Spirit, and since they were fleshly and didn't understand these things they were not qualified to make judgments on these things or to judge Paul and his ministry; however, some of the Corinthian Christians were wrongly judging Paul and his ministry.]], **yet he himself is appraised** [or, judged, or the equivalent] **by no one.** [[(This double bracket goes on for three paragraphs.) I believe this verse rather strongly confirms what I said under verse 14 about Paul's including the fleshly Christians at Corinth in the "unspiritual" man in a way that was strongly insulting to those Christians at Corinth who were "unspiritual" and "walking like mere men [unbelievers (3:3)]." The apostle was making the point here that, although (at least some of) the fleshly Christians at Corinth were JUDGING him (see the next paragraph), they were way out of line, because as he says here, "yet he himself [the spiritual Christian] is judged by no one." Paul certainly qualified to be a "spiritual" Christian, even as they were quite unspiritual and not qualified to judge Paul or other spiritual things.

It is apparently quite significant that the same Greek verb, "anakrino," is used in 1 Cor. 4:3, 4 and 9:3 of the apostle being judged by Christians at Corinth and that he deals

with this topic other places in 1 and 2 Corinthians. I'll quote 1 Cor. 4:3-5 from the NIV: "I care very little if I am judged ["anakrino"] by you or by any human court; indeed, I do not even judge myself. [The apostle Paul made it a top priority to always walk in the center of God's will, but he realized that God is the only one qualified to be our Judge.] (4) My conscience is clear [that's a good testimony], but that does not make me innocent [before God]. It is the Lord who judges ["anakrino"] me. (5) Therefore judge [Greek verb "krino," from which "anakrino" was derived] nothing [very much including judging Paul and his ministry] before the appointed time; wait till the Lord comes. He will bring to light what is hidden in darkness and will expose the motives of men's hearts. At that time each will receive his praise [or something else] from God." The apostle clearly was not saying that we are not to do any judging during this age. He rebuked the Christians at Corinth for not dealing with the serious sin spoken of in 1 Corinthians chapter 5, for example. But they were way out of line judging Paul with bogus accusations.

I'll also quote 1 Cor. 9:3 from the NIV: "This is my defense to those who sit in judgment ["anakrino"] on me." And he goes on to give a lengthy defense. As he explained, he gave his defense for the sake of the Christians at Corinth who needed to see that the apostle was a faithful minister of the gospel, unlike the false apostles of 1 Cor. 11:13 and other ministers, who, for one thing, attacked Paul and his ministry with bogus judgments.]] **(16) For WHO HAS KNOWN THE MIND OF THE LORD, THAT HE WILL INSTRUCT HIM?** [[Compare Isa. 40:13, Septuagint version; Rom. 11:34. Of course no one "will instruct [God]" (but many try to, and many even have the boldness to criticize Him or even to deny His existence), but those who are spiritual by His Spirit do "have the mind of the Lord," and are able to think right (cf., e.g., Rom. 8:5-9) and make right judgments. It is extremely important that the Spirit of God enables us to think right, especially to think right in our hearts. Thinking right by the Holy Spirit is a big part of what it means to walk by the Holy Spirit, which we are called, enabled, required and privileged to do on a continuous basis (cf. Gal. 5:16; Rom. 8:1-4). However, the fact that we (born-again Christians) are called to walk by the Spirit doesn't guarantee that Christians will walk by the Spirit on a continuous basis (the Corinthian Christians proved that), but to the extent we don't walk by the Spirit, Christianity cannot work right, and we must be aware of the fact that born-again Christians can lose their salvation. (See my paper "Once Saved, Always Saved?" on my internet site. Google to Karl Kemp Teaching.)

The apostle is very much including the point here, even emphasizing the point, that the fleshly Christians at Corinth (or anywhere else) are not able (though they think they are) to instruct (or to judge) Paul. This did not mean that Paul could not benefit from the counsel of others.]] **But we have the mind of Christ.** [[(See the first paragraph under this verse.) In a different context the "we" could refer to Paul and all Christians, but in

this context the "we" is limited to Paul and a few others (see under 2:6). He is distinguishing between himself (and a few others) and the large number of fleshy Christians at Corinth, which he has been doing since 2:6 and will continue to do through 3:1-9. For one thing, to the extent Christians are "unspiritual" (2:14), "men of flesh" and "infants in Christ" (3:1), and "fleshy" and "walking like mere men [unbelievers]" (3:3) they do not "have the mind of Christ" - they are not thinking like He thinks and would have them think - they are not thinking by the Holy Spirit, which true Christians are enabled and required to do (cf., e.g., Rom. 8:5-9; 12:1, 2; and Eph. 4:23; these passages are all discussed in my paperback book "Holiness and Victory Over Sin" and my recently published e-book, "Righteousness, Holiness, and Victory Over Sin"; both books are available at amazon.com).] **(3:1) And I, brethren** [[The apostle made it clear with the word "brethren" that he considered them (at least most of them) to still be true Christians, in spite of their fleshiness. However, he was exhorting and warning them here, and throughout 1 and 2 Corinthians, that they could not continue in that fleshy state. It was far from what they were called to in the gospel and a very dangerous place to be.]] **could not speak to you as to spiritual** [[(Compare 1 Cor. 14:37.) Greek adjective "pneumatikos" in the plural, masculine form, as in 2:13, and the singular, masculine was used in 2:15. "Spiritual" men are contrasted with the "unspiritual" men of 2:14 and the "men of flesh" and "infants in Christ" of 3:1 and the "fleshy" and those "walking like mere men" of 3:3. The expressions "men of flesh," "infants in Christ," "fleshy," and "walking like mere men" all communicate the idea of being unspiritual (of not being spiritual by the Spirit of God). As I have mentioned, all of these expressions would have been extremely insulting to the Corinthians, who prided themselves on their spirituality. If the apostle Paul loved them, he had to exhort them to repent where repentance was required, and Paul had to be faithful to fulfill his ministry before God.

I'll quote a paragraph from what A. Robertson and A. Plummer (see under 2:14) say here (on page 52): "Ideally, all Christians are 'pneumatikoi' (1 Cor. 12:3, 13; Gal. 4:5-7): but by no means all the Corinthians were such in fact. Along with the heathen, they are in the category of "psuchikoi" [2:14] or "sarkinoi" [3:1; these "oi" endings go with these masculine plural adjectives in the Greek], but they are not on a level with the heathen. They are babes in character, but 'babes in Christ'; and apart from the special matters for blame, there are many healthy features in their condition (1:4-9, 11:2)."] **men, but as to men of flesh** [(This double bracket goes on for eight paragraphs.) The Greek translated "men of flesh" here is the masculine, plural of the adjective "sarkinos," which was derived from the Greek noun "sarks," which is normally translated "flesh." This Greek adjective is used four times in the New Testament.

The use of this adjective in ROMANS 7:14 is instructive: "For we know that the Law [the Mosaic Law, which was the foundation for the old covenant] is spiritual [in that it came

from God; masculine, singular of the Greek adjective "pneumatikos" that agrees with the masculine, singular Greek noun for "Law," "nomos.," but I am of flesh [[The word "flesh" was translated from the masculine, singular of the Greek adjective "sarkinos." There is no difference in meaning between "of flesh" here in 7:14 and being "in the flesh ["sarks"]" in Rom. 7:5.]], sold [better, "having been sold"; perfect tense in the Greek] into bondage to sin." We know what the apostle Paul meant by "having been sold into bondage to sin," because in Rom. 5:12-21 he discussed how Adam and all of his descendants came under the condemnation of spiritual death and bondage to sin through Adam's rebellion/transgression.

In Romans chapter 7 Paul was making the super-important point that people who are spiritually dead and in bondage to sin need more than the Mosaic Law and the old covenant to save them. God always planned to save all believers (including believers from Old Testament days) through the new covenant established on the shed blood of the Lamb of God. As the apostle showed throughout Romans chapters 1-8, for example, we must be born-again and indwelt by the Holy Spirit, and then walk by the Holy Spirit on a continuous basis by faith, to have the authority and power to live in the truth, righteousness, and holiness of God (for the glory of God).

With the words "I am of flesh, having been sold into bondage to sin" of Rom. 7:14, Paul was speaking for those who were under the Mosaic Law, with a strong application for the rest of mankind too (we were all spiritually dead and in bondage to sin). There is no way that Paul could have said that he, as a Christian, was "of flesh, having been sold into bondage to sin." That would contradict what he had just said throughout Romans chapter 6, what he said in Rom. 7:5, 6, and what he will go on to say in Romans chapter 8, for example, about our being set free from spiritual death and bondage to sin through the powerful saving, sanctifying grace of God in Christ, which includes all the work of the Holy Spirit, who dwells in all born-again Christians. The apostle powerfully demonstrated in Rom. 7:14-25 that those under the Law (along with the rest of mankind that were not under the Law) were not able to keep the Law because they were still "of flesh, having been sold into bondage to sin." To be "of flesh" in this context meant, for one primary thing, that they were still spiritually dead, not having been born again by the Spirit and indwelt by the Spirit of life, truth, righteousness, and holiness. The new birth wasn't available until after the Lamb of God had been crucified, resurrected, taken up to the Father's right hand and received the promised Spirit, which He began to pour out on believers on the Day of Pentecost (cf., e.g., Acts 2:33; Rom. 8:2-4, 9).

These super-important things (including Romans chapter 7) are discussed in detail in my book, "Holiness and Victory Over Sin: Full Salvation Through the Atoning Death of the Lord Jesus Christ" and in my recently published e-book, "Righteousness, Holiness,

and Victory Over Sin." The e-book serves as an introduction to the paperback book and should be read first. (Both books are available at amazon.com.) Romans chapter 7 is also discussed in some detail in a paper on my internet site (Google to Karl Kemp Teaching). It is significant that I haven't been able to find any Christian writers in the early Christian church before about AD 400 who understood Rom. 7:14-25 to teach that Christians will continue to sin. (See my e-book and the paper on Romans 7.)

To be "of flesh" in Rom. 7:14 includes the idea of being spiritually dead, which includes not being indwelt by the all-important Spirit of truth, life, righteousness, and holiness. Paul's use of the same Greek adjective (in the masculine, plural) that is translated "men of flesh" in 1 Cor. 3:1 demonstrates, for one thing, that it is totally unacceptable for Christians to be "men of flesh." That was a very insulting thing to say of the Christians at Corinth (or anywhere else). However, the context (for example, he called them "brethren" and "infants [or babes] IN CHRIST") makes it clear that Paul wasn't denying that they were born-again Christians. But he was clearly saying that they were not living much by the Spirit, which Christians are called, enabled, and required to do on a continuous basis. Paul was strongly insulting them and exhorting them to become what they are called, enabled, required, and privileged to be by God's definition.

I'll quote part of what Gordon D. Fee says here ("First Epistle to the Corinthians" [Eerdmans, 1997], pages 123, 124): "By saying that he 'could not address them as spiritual,' he seems to be allowing that there are 'unspiritual' Christians - which is both true and not true. It is *not* true in the sense that the Spirit is the crucial factor in whether one is or is not a believer; one cannot be a Christian and be devoid of Spirit (cf. Rom. 8:9; Gal. 3:2-3; Tit. 3:5-7). On the other hand, the Corinthians are involved in a lot of unchristian behavior, in that sense they are 'unspiritual,' not because they lack the Spirit but because they are thinking and living just like those who do. ... ..to shame them into reality.... They consider themselves "pneumatikoi" [spiritual], whatever else. ...."

I'll also include a few sentences from what Fee says under 3:4 (page 128). "[Some wrongly infer] that because these people are believers, yet 'carnal [fleshly],' it is therefore permissible to be 'carnal Christians.' That, of course, is precisely the wrong application. There is no question that Paul considers his Corinthian friends believers [at least most of them] and that they are in fact acting otherwise. But Paul's whole concern was to get them to change, not to allow that such behavior is permissible since not all Christians are yet mature [or, perfect (2:6)]. Paul's language is ironical, not permissive. ... Remaining worldly ["fleshly"; "worldly" was used in the NIV, which Fee was using] is not one of the options."



Walking in the flesh is dangerous. For one thing, believers can become unbelievers (see my paper "Once Saved, Always Saved?" on my internet site; Google to Karl Kemp Teaching). The apostle was repeatedly exhorting, insulting (with much biting sarcasm), and warning the Christians at Corinth that they must repent where repentance was required (see 1 Corinthians chapters 5 and 10 for example, and 2 Cor. 5:20-6:1; in 2 Cor. 13:5 he exhorted them to test themselves to see if they were in the faith (if they were real Christians).)], **as to infants in Christ.** [[As I mentioned, these words confirm that Paul was not saying that the Corinthians were not born-again Christians, but also that these words were very insulting, designed to hopefully humble them and wake them up. It is significant that Paul spent 18 months in Corinth when he first visited the city (Acts 18:11). That was a long time for him to be there, and the Corinthians had the great privilege of hearing the gospel from a person who was greatly anointed by God to be the apostle to the Gentiles, and who understood the gospel and lived it on a very high level. There was no excuse for them to be unspiritual, fleshly, infants in Christ. As I have mentioned, Paul undoubtedly overstated their fleshiness, etc. with his strong insults in an attempt to wake them up, but the problem at Corinth was quite serious.]] **(2) I gave you milk to drink** [[The "milk" that the apostle gave them was glorious indeed. It was more than sufficient for them to be born-again (which they were) and to walk in the truth, righteousness, and holiness of God with the victory over all sin (which they weren't).)], **not solid food; for you were not yet able to receive it. Indeed, even now you are not yet able, (3) for you are still fleshly** [[Greek adjective "sarkikos," masculine, plural. This Greek adjective, like the Greek adjective "sarkinos," which was used in 3:1, was derived from the Greek noun "sarks," which is typically translated "flesh." I don't believe Paul intended any very important distinction between these two adjectives in 3:1 and 3. Both adjectives put the emphasis on the fact that they were not spiritual by the Spirit, even though they were born-again Christians. I'll quote part of what the BAGD Greek Lexicon says under "sarkikos" (page 914): " 'sarkikos' means 'belonging to the "sarks" ' (opposite 'pneumatikos'), 'fleshly'; on the other hand, 'sarkinos' is 'consisting/composed of flesh,' fleshy. Our literature, or at least its copyists, for the most part did not observe this distinction in all occurrences of the word. The forms are usually interchanged in the tradition; for exceptions see..."].] **For since there is jealousy and strife among you** [cf. 1 Cor. 11:19; Rom. 13:13] **are you not fleshly** ["sarkikos," masculine, plural as earlier in this verse], **and are you not walking like mere men?** [[The Greek would be more literally translated "are you not walking in accordance with man?" The context shows that Paul means unbelieving man. All of the things the apostle said about the Christians at Corinth in 3:1-3 (and apparently including 2:14-16) were powerfully insulting, on purpose, as we have discussed. With these last words, for example, he said they were walking like the unbelievers walk. No surprise since he has already told them that they were not spiritual by the Spirit, but were "men of flesh" and "fleshly" instead of being spiritual by the Spirit and "infants in Christ," along

with what he said in 2:14-16. And here in 3:3 he mentions two manifestations of their unspiritual, fleshly behavior, "jealousy and strife." In the next verse he goes on to show that jealousy and strife were manifested, for one way, in the way they destroyed the unity of the church in that they chose one leader over another (Paul and Apollos, for example) in a way that mimicked the unbelievers.

I'll quote a few sentences from what Simon J. Kistemaker says here ("1 Corinthians" [Baker, 1993], page 102): "When Clement of Rome wrote his epistle to the Corinthians near the end of the first century [Paul went to Corinth about AD 50 and wrote 1 Corinthians about AD 55], fully aware of their numerous congregational problems, he frequently used the terms 'jealousy,' 'envy,' and 'strife.' [Kistemaker lists some passages from 1 Clement in a footnote.] Choosing words that depict the life of the Corinthians, Clement notes the vices that for many decades have plagued them (compare James 3:14). The Corinthians quarreled among themselves, were devoid of love for one another, and behaved like unspiritual people." They were "unspiritual" people in that they did not walk by the Spirit of God on a consistent basis, by grace through faith, in accordance with the requirement of the gospel. I trust we can all agree that the problems at Corinth cannot be laid at the apostle Paul's feet, or in any defect in the gospel or the grace of God available to the Corinthians. The proud, fleshly Christians were responsible. This teaching is needed by many Christians in our day. It is easy to be fleshly.]] **(4) For when one says, 'I am of Paul,' and another, 'I am of Apollos,' are you not walking like mere men?** [[Compare 1 Cor. 1:10-17. See under verse 3 for the interpretation. The apostle Paul just has the words corresponding to "are you not men," but the translation of the NASB communicates his meaning OK. The KJV and NKJV have "are you not carnal?," following the Greek texts that have the reading "sarkikoi" instead of "anthropoi" for "men." There is no substantial difference in this context between walking like unbelievers and being carnal/fleshly.]] **(5) What then is Apollos? And what is Paul? Servants through whom you believed, even as the Lord gave opportunity to each one.** [[Paul used Apollos and himself in verses 5-9, 21-23 to show that the Christians at Corinth (and elsewhere) must look to God and give Him all the glory for everything, very much including giving Him the glory for those He uses to minister to us (they minister by His grace, for one thing [cf. 1 Cor. 3:10, 11; 15:10; 2 Cor. 3:5, 6; Eph. 3:7; Col. 1:25). We must be thankful for the ministers God uses in our lives and appreciate them, but we must not give them any of God's glory. Also, ministers must be careful that they do not look for, or accept, any of God's glory.]] **(6) I planted** [cf. 1 Cor. 3:10, 11; 4:15; 9:1; 2 Cor. 10:14-18], **Apollos** [cf. Acts 18:24-28; 1 Cor. 1:12] **watered, but God was causing the growth.** [God was causing the growth along with enabling Paul and Apollos to minister by His grace. Also see the next verse.] **(7) So then neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but God who causes the growth.** [The apostle Paul goes on in verses 8 and 14 to mention

that God will reward faithful ministers for their work (their work of ministering by His grace).] **(8) Now he who plants and he who waters are one** [[Paul and Apollos were united and not competing with one another, or jealous of one another, etc., as it must be. To the extent ministers are doing any of these things (which things take place when we are walking and ministering to some extent in the flesh), it seriously harms the unity of the Body of Christ and is a serious problem. The apostle wrote what he did in these verses knowing that some of those who ministered at Corinth were guilty of doing this. I believe he could have mentioned the names of some who ministered at Corinth, including some who were Corinthians along with some who came to Corinth, but he chose to use Apollos and himself to make his point.]]; **but each will receive his own reward according to his own labor.** [[Compare 1 Cor. 3:14; 4:5; Gal. 6:4. For one thing, the reward of one minister is not increased or decreased because of the performance of other ministers. It doesn't work for the good of one minister, for example, if another minister fails, but it robs God of glory and harms the Body of Christ.]] **For we are God's fellow workers** [cf. Mark 16:20; 2 Cor. 6:1]; **you are God's field** [cf. Isa. 61:3], **God's building** [cf. 1 Cor. 3:16; Eph. 2:20-22; 1 Pet. 2:5]. **(10) According to the grace of God which was given to me** [[Paul emphasized the point, as he so often did, that God must be given all the glory for everything He enabled Paul (and all of us) to do by His grace. If he didn't make it a top priority to minister by the grace of God in Christ, he couldn't have accomplished what he did, and if he didn't consistently make it known that he ministered by the grace of God, but took the glory for himself (or some of the glory) through pride, he would have destroyed his ministry.]], **like a wise master builder I laid a foundation, and another is building on it. But each man must be careful how he builds on it.** [[The apostle Paul is concerned here with some of the other people who ministered at Corinth after he laid the foundation. (It is true, of course, that every true Christian is building on the foundation of the Lord Jesus, but in this context Paul is dealing with the ministers. The ministers, some more than others, have more influence to bless or to hurt the Body of Christ.) The apostle's words here zero in on his work at Corinth, but they would apply to the Christian church anywhere. As I mentioned, I believe Paul could have mentioned the names of some people who were ministering at Corinth who needed to be warned and corrected.

Paul wanted to exhort and encourage those who were faithfully ministering and building on the foundation that he laid, but his primary purpose here was to exhort and warn those who were not faithfully ministering and building on that foundation, for whatever reason. He goes on to warn that those born-again ministers who are building with fleshly materials and methods will suffer loss of rewards when God puts their ministries to the test at the end. That will prove to be quite significant! This is no light matter! For one very important thing, every minister must face the fact that their fleshiness hurts other Christians and robs God of glory.

Fleshy materials and methods include relying on human wisdom (rather than having an adequate understanding of God's wisdom that is contained in His Word and comes by the Holy Spirit [see the "word of wisdom" in 1 Cor. 12:8, for example; cf. James 1:5; 3:15, 17, 19), philosophical presentations, eloquence, personalities, criticizing Paul and others trying to make themselves look better, flattery, etc. The apostle would have been concerned about the Corinthians who were "ministering" improperly at Corinth and "ministers" who had come to Corinth, which in the worst-case scenario included "false apostles" (2 Cor. 11:12-15). Some were so far off that they were destroying the foundation laid by the apostle Paul; their "ministries" served to destroy the church (see 3:16, 17). They were not genuine Christian ministers.]] **(11) For no man can lay a foundation other than the one which is laid, which is Christ Jesus. (12) Now if any man builds on the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones** [[The apostle is speaking here in 3:12-15 of born-again Christian ministers. The fact that Paul says that they will be saved in 3:15 demonstrates that he is speaking of true Christians who ascribe to the foundational Christian doctrines (doctrines like everything that exists was created by God; the deity of Christ and His atoning death and resurrection and that He is coming again to save and to judge; the reality of sin and eternal judgment [heaven and hell], etc.). However, there is a very big difference between those who walk and minister by the Spirit of God on a continuous basis, with a strong emphasis on the truth (it is totally necessary for Christians to rightly interpret, believe, and walk in line with the truth of God's Word), righteousness, and holiness of God and the fruit of the Holy Spirit (Gal. 5:22, 23) and those who are fleshly to one degree or another, which is easy to do, especially in an environment like Corinth (or much of the world in our day). The old man always wants to manifest itself in sin, and it has the support of the world and the devil and his evil angels and demons.

All of the problems that the apostle Paul was concerned about as he wrote 3:12-15 (and most of the rest of the verses in this chapter) could be described by the word "fleshiness." The ministers Paul is speaking of here are all born again Christians, but (although all Christians are enabled and required to walk by the Spirit on a continuous basis [Gal. 5:16 for example]) it doesn't always happen. Fleshiness is contrasted with being spiritual by walking by the Holy Spirit (walking by the Holy Spirit includes walking in line with the Word of God) on a continuous basis. Fleshiness opens the door for every kind of sin.

To build on the foundation with "gold, silver, [and] precious" stones is to do the things that God requires of each minister, with the right attitudes, motives (cf. 1 Cor. 4:5), and priorities, things that establish the Body of Christ in the truth, righteousness, and holiness of God and lead to the growth and fruitfulness of the church (including the fruit

of the Holy Spirit [Gal. 5:22, 23]), being enabled by the Holy Spirit, by grace through faith, all of which brings glory to God. Those ministers who build with gold, silver, and precious stones guide, encourage, and motivate Christians to love God (and other Christians and all people) and to trust Him and obey Him, and to have a super-solid hope regarding the future, especially referring to heaven. For one thing, gold, silver, and precious stones represent eternal things, things that will endure in God's kingdom forever. The things that are represented by wood, hay, and straw will all perish when they are tested by fire (see 3:13-15); they cannot be accepted by God or rewarded; quite the opposite; they will perish; there is no room for them in heaven.]], **wood, hay, straw** [[At least they are building on the right foundation (of Christ and Him crucified), but the "wood, hay, and straw" represent building with fleshy materials and methods, "fleshy" in contrast with building by the enablement of the Holy Spirit with a strong emphasis on the truth, righteousness, and holiness of God and all the fruit of the Holy Spirit, for the glory of God. To the extent that Christians walk by the flesh (very much including ministers) attitudes, motives, and priorities will often be wrong, and pride will be manifested instead of being humble before God and people; and, as I mentioned, fleshiness opens the door for sin to be manifested, where righteousness should be manifested. Christians are forgiven when they sincerely repent, but all sin is destructive, and ministering in the flesh harms the Body of Christ and robs God of glory.

One way we can build with fleshy materials (and this often happened in the early church and is still happening in our day) is to add secondary things to the gospel, things that may, or may not, be good in themselves, but things that are not required by God and which confuse the issue. If we are not careful, the heart of the glorious gospel is obscured and diluted by the things we have added that God didn't include in the gospel. This is easy to do in many different areas. In 2 Tim. 2:14-26 the apostle Paul spoke of some of the things ministers must do and some of the things they must not do. One serious problem was that some were insisting that Christians are required to keep the ceremonial law of the old covenant. This can be done in a way that totally confuses the issue and changes the gospel, which is not subject to change (cf., e.g., Gal. 5:1-12; Col. 2:1-23).]], **(13) each man's work will become evident** [[That is, the work of ministry (made up of individual works) of each minister will become evident: Were the works of God (of His will and by His grace) and beneficial to the Body of Christ and did they glorify Him? Or were they of the flesh and not beneficial to, or harmful to, the Body of Christ and did not glorify God?]]; **for the day** [[The apostle is speaking of the day when we will stand before God to be judged according to our works at the end of this age (cf., e.g., 1 Cor. 1:8; 4:5; Rom. 2:16; 2 Tim. 4:8). In this context the apostle is speaking of the work of ministers being tested, but there is an application for all Christians.]] **will show it because it is to be revealed with fire, and the fire itself will test the quality of each man's work.** [[There is no idea here that true Christian ministers will be

punished by fire on that day (or before that day), but that their work of ministry will be tested by fire. The things they have built, so to speak, while ministering, picturing their work as a building (or part of a building), will be tested with fire. The faithfulness and fruitfulness or the unfaithfulness and unfruitfulness of their ministries will then be manifested. That which was rightly done by the grace of God in Christ, in agreement with the will of God, which is represented by the gold, silver, and precious stones, will remain (endure) after being tested by the fire, and they "will receive a reward" (3:14). That which was done in the flesh, the wood, hay, and straw, will not endure the testing fire; those things will perish in the fire; and the ministers "will suffer loss" (3:14).] **(14) If any man's work which he has built on it remains, he will receive a reward** [[Compare 1 Cor. 3:8; 4:5. All Christians will be rewarded for faithfulness, but in this context Paul is speaking of ministers. I'll quote 1 Cor. 4:5, "Therefore do not go on passing judgment before the time [In this context the apostle is referring to the fact that some of the Corinthians Christians were (wrongly) judging him in various ways], *but* wait until the Lord comes who will bring to light the things hidden in the darkness and disclose the motives of *men's* hearts, and then each man's praise [or something else] will come to him from God." The praise of God (cf. Rom. 2:29; 1 Pet. 1:7) is a great reward, not to mention having a never-ending existence in heaven, the glory of which is too great to fully comprehend, and even reigning forever and ever with God and His Son (cf. Rev. 22:5). Based on verses like Matt. 25:21, 23 (cf. Luke 19:17, 18), we can see that the reward will include being given authority along with the words that all true Christians want to hear, "Well done good and faithful slave [servant]." I'll quote 1 Pet. 1:7, "so that the proof of your faith, *being* more precious than gold which is perishable, even though tested by fire, may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ."]. **(15) If any man's work is burned up, he will suffer loss** [[For one thing, he will suffer the loss of rewards (or some rewards). Also, it will be obvious that his fleshly ministry has hurt the Body of Christ and robbed God of glory. This is a weighty matter! We must not take these things lightly! The apostle wanted to motivate those who needed to change to change now, so they will be fully ready to stand before God. Anywhere any Christian needs to repent, NOW is the time to do it. God calls us to repent because He loves us, not to mention that He wants every minister to fully accomplish His will for the good of the Body of Christ and for His glory. We were created, and saved, to glorify God, to be loved by Him and to love Him.]], **but he himself will be saved** [[In other words, he will have entrance into God's eternal kingdom because he became, and continued to be, a born-again Christian, by grace through faith, even though quite a bit of fleshiness was manifested in his ministry (which is far from being acceptable). We are called, and enabled, to walk by the Holy Spirit on a continuous basis. Fleshly Christians will typically have quite a bit of error in their teaching, but the Christian ministers Paul is speaking of here were not denying essential Christian doctrines.

Fleshy Christians typically do not realize that they are fleshy. I have heard Christians say that making it to heaven is all that really matters, but that is a totally unacceptable way to think. What about doing the will of God, which God's people are required, and enabled, to do according to God's covenant? What about the first great commandment about the need to love God with all of our heart, soul, mind and strength. What about not being a blessing to, or even hurting, other Christians (or non Christians).], **yet so as through fire** [(This double bracket goes on for six paragraphs.) Compare Job 23:10. The fire is explained by the context. Some ministers who are so proud of their ministries will find themselves running out of the building, or their part of the building, that they were so proud of. When their work is tested with fire, it will be shown that much of their ministry was built on things of the flesh, like worldly wisdom, eloquent speaking, flattery and manipulation, or other things that didn't come from God that were added to the gospel that confused the issue. If you give Christians what they want, so far as the flesh is concerned, you can typically build a big ministry, but the fire will not be kind to such building projects when they are tested.

I'll quote part of what R. C. H. Lenski says under 3:15 ("St. Paul's First and Second Epistles to the Corinthians" [Augsburg Publishing House, 1937, 1963], pages 144, 145): "For the builder the result is: 'he shall suffer loss.' All to which he devoted his life shall be suddenly swept away. He shall stand bare where he might have had so much. Hence there is, of course, no thought of wages for him, and this is the great loss [at least this is a significant part of the loss]. Many great 'works' shall thus go down in ashes in the judgment and be absolutely disowned by the Lord. Many proud builders who were acclaimed by men while they lived and were honored with great tributes when they were buried shall hang their heads when all their work becomes nothing in the fire test. But many humble preacher, of whom nobody made much in life, shall shine at that day because he wrought gold, silver, and precious stones.

... 'Yet as through fire' indicates the narrow escape. He is like a man who flees from a burning building, is badly frightened, and saves nothing but his life. ... The picture seems to be somewhat on this order: this builder stands in the house of his work, and when the judgment-fire strikes and devours it, he rushes out. Who wants to spend all his life in the ministry and then end in such a way?"

I'll quote part of what Charles Hodge says under verses 14, 15 ("1 and 2 Corinthians" [Banner of Truth Trust, 1983 reprint; his "1 Corinthians" was originally published in 1857), pages 57, 58): "... The apostle is speaking of those teachers who, although they retain the foundational doctrines of the gospel, yet combine them with error. This is plain from v. 12, 'If any man shall build on this foundation.' It is not enough, therefore, that a

minister hold fast to fundamental truth; he must take heed what he teaches in connection with that truth. If he mingles with it the wood, hay and stubble of his own philosophy [or any other wrong source], he will find himself a loser on the day of judgment. ...."

And I'll quote part of what F. Godet says under verse 15 ("First Epistle to the Corinthians" [Zondervan 1971 reprint, originally published in French in 1886], page 190; these words first got my attention when I read them more than forty years ago and they still get my attention): "[The fire] comprehends all the terrors of this judgment: the shame of this revelation, the horror caused by the look of the offended Judge, the grief of seeing the work on which he congratulated himself reduced to nothingness, and the souls whom he thought he had built up incapable of undergoing the last trial, and lost partly through his fault...!" Hopefully this minister gave them enough of the essential truth of the gospel so that he was not responsible for the loss of any people (that is almost too much for any minister to contemplate, that their ministry was responsible for people being eternally lost), even if he did incorporate some fleshiness in his ministry. Words like this should motivate all ministers to evaluate their ministries. It makes a gigantic difference whether we minister as we are enabled and required, or whether we (one way or another) have eliminated foundational doctrines or presented an admixture of the things of the flesh.

And I'll quote several sentences from what Godet said later on this page" "Some Catholic commentators have thought to find in the words, 'as through fire,' a proof in favour of the doctrine of purgatory, and the Council of Florence, in 1439, based the dogma on this passage [[and he referred to T. C. Edwards on 1 Corinthians. I'll quote Edwards footnote dealing with this topic (Klock and Klock reprint of Edwards's 1885 edition, page 81): "Gregory the Great (Dial. IV. 39) [who was the pope from 590-604], who consolidated the floating notions of earlier writers [very much including Augustine] into a doctrine of purgatory, and the Council...of Florence, AD 1439, base the doctrine on this passage. [And he goes on to mention some Roman Catholic expositors who reject the interpretation.] ]] This is to forget 1. That the fire is allegorical [figurative] like the building; 2. That it is only teachers [ministers] who are in question; 3. That the trial indicated is a means of valuation [testing], not of purification [or punishment of purgatory]' 4. That this fire is lighted at Christ's coming, and consequently does not yet burn in the interval between the death of Christians and that advent [the return of Christ]; and 5. That the salvation of the worker, of which Paul speaks, takes place not 'by,' but 'in spite of' the fire."]] **(16) Do you not know that you** [plural; the church at Corinth] **are a temple of God** [Or we could translate "the temple of God" (cf., e.g., Eph. 2:19-22).], **and that the Spirit of God dwells in you? (17) If any man destroys the temple of God, God will destroy him, for the temple of God is holy, and that is**



**what you are** [The Body of Christ, which includes all true Christians, is called, enabled, and required to be holy, to be set apart for God and His truth, righteousness and holiness from everything unholy and defiling [cf. 2 Cor. 7:1, for example]. [(This double bracket goes on for three paragraphs.)] The fact that the Greek shows that all four uses of "you" in verses 16 and 17 are plural is important information. It shows that the apostle is concerned with "Christian ministers" (cf., e.g., the false apostles of 2 Cor. 11:13-15) doing things that could potentially destroy the church at Corinth, if God permitted that to happen. He was not speaking (as you often hear these verses interpreted) of Paul dealing with Christians for not taking adequate care of the temple of their bodies. Christians have some responsibility to take care of their bodies, but that is a small problem compared with "Christian ministers" doing things that could totally destroy the church at Corinth: Things like heretical doctrines that deny the deity of Christ or that minimize, or even deny, the need for Christians to live for God in His truth, righteousness, and holiness by His grace through faith.

The Gnostics (that the apostle John dealt with in his first epistle) even denied that sin is the problem and that the blood of the sacrificed Lamb of God is relevant to our salvation. If the Spirit of God does not dwell in us individually and corporately we are not true Christians (cf., e.g., Rom. 8:9). We must be born again by the Spirit of God (cf., e.g., John 3:1-8), and we must walk by the Spirit of God on a continuous basis (cf., e.g., Gal. 5:16).

There is a big difference between fleshy ministers who are building on the foundation of the Lord Jesus Christ (3:10-15), who will suffer loss but make it into the heavenly kingdom, and "ministers" who are destroying the foundations of Christianity through their "ministries." **(18)** [(The NASB shows that a new paragraph began with verse 16 by having the 16 in bold letters. They also showed (correctly I believe) that another new paragraph begins here with verse 18. Verse 18 and the verses that follow deal, at least for the most part, with the fleshy (but who will be saved [3:15]) ministers at Corinth that the apostle was dealing with in 3:1-15 and in chapter 2. Those that "God will destroy" (3:17) will not be saved.)] **Let no man deceive himself** [cf. Isa. 5:21]. **If any man among you thinks that he is wise in this age** [(Compare 1 Cor. 1:18-27. Some of the Christians at Corinth, including some ministers, thought they were wise in this age, but they had humbled themselves to some extent to become Christians; however, as this epistle shows, there still was a problem with many of the Christians at Corinth because of their fleshiness, which manifested itself, for one way, in their being proud of their presumed wisdom.)], **he must become foolish** [(In other words, he must humble himself and begin to manifest humility through walking in line with the Word of God and by the Spirit of God on a continuous basis, "so that he become wise," with the true wisdom that comes from God.)], **so that he may become wise** [(I'll quote a few

sentences from what David E. Garland says under 3:18-21a ("1 Corinthians" [Baker Academic, 2003], page 123): "To be wise one must be willing to become a fool in the eyes of the world. ... Those who are wise in their own eyes have not yet come to terms with the fact that they still have to reckon with God, who makes human wisdom look foolish. Paul assumes that human judgments are inherently skewed until they are set aright by God's Spirit. Consequently, humans must empty themselves of their own wisdom to be filled with God's wisdom (Calvin...)."]. **(19) For the wisdom of this world is foolishness before God.** [I'll quote the last sentence of 1 Cor. 1:20, "Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world?"] **For it is written, 'He is THE ONE WHO CATCHES THE WISE IN THEIR CRAFTINESS** [cf. Job. 5:13]"; **(20) and again, 'THE LORD KNOWS THE REASONINGS of the wise, THAT THEY ARE USELESS.'** [[The Greek Septuagint for Psalm 93:11 (94:11 in the English Bibles) is the same as the quotation here in verse 20 except the Septuagint has the Greek for "of men" instead of "of the wise."]] **(21) So then let no one boast in men.** [Compare 1 Cor. 1:10-17. Our boasting must be in God (cf. 1 Cor. 1:29-31).] **For all things belong to you** [[speaking of all things that God has given to us ("things present or things to come" [3:22]) through new-covenant salvation in Christ Jesus, including the ministers He raises up to minister to us (including those who have writings included in the New Testament), like "Paul or Apollos or Cephas [Peter]" (3:22). See 1 Cor. 3:4-9. God raised Jesus (the God-man) over all things (cf., e.g., Eph. 1:19-22) and then He gave Him with His authority over all things to (and for the benefit of) the church (cf. Eph. 1:22). Since God has given all things to us in Christ Jesus, we need not, and we must not look to any other sources for the things we need (like other religions, occult power, worldly wisdom and philosophies), and we must be thankful to God and make sure we give Him all the glory.]], **(22) whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas** [Peter; cf. 1:12] **or the world** [[For one thing, we will inherit the world at the end of this age (cf., e.g., Rom. 4:13; Matt. 5:5; 1 Cor. 6:2, 3), very much including the new heaven and new earth with its new Jerusalem in the eternal state after the millennial kingdom (cf. Rev. 20:11; 21:1-22:21). The devil still is the god of this world (2 Cor. 4:4), but because of our relationship with God in Christ, the devil and his evil angels and demons and sin do not have any legitimate authority over us. Our salvation in Christ Jesus makes all the difference.]] **or life** [[We have spiritual, eternal life now in Christ. In the future we will inherit the fullness of eternal life (cf., e.g., 1 Tim. 6:12, 19; Titus 3:7; and Rev. 12:5 [Revelation 12:5 is discussed in detail in my book, "The Mid-Week Rapture" and my recently published e-book, "Introduction to the Mid-Week Rapture"; both books are available at amazon.com; I recommend reading the e-book first.]) and be glorified.]] **or death** [[For one thing, the apostle Paul informs us in Rom. 8:38, 39 "that neither DEATH, nor LIFE [my capitalization for emphasis], nor angels [evil ones], nor principalities [evil ones], nor things present, not things to come, nor powers [evil ones], nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing [evil thing], will be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord."

Although physical death is still an enemy in some ways, for us to die is gain (Phil. 1:21, 23; 2 Cor. 5:1-8 [I'll quote 2 Cor. 5:8, "we are of good courage, I say, and prefer rather to be absent from the body and to be at home with the Lord]; and see 1 Cor. 15:50-57).]] **or things present or things to come; all things belong to you, (23) and you belong to Christ** [And we must be faithful to Him and the One who sent Him and walk by the Holy Spirit He gave to dwell in us on a continuous basis (by grace through faith).]; **and Christ belongs to God.**" [[The fact that the Lord Jesus has been given to us is a major feature of new-covenant salvation. First, He was given to us in His all-important atoning death. I'll quote Rom. 8:32, "He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him over for us all, how will He not also with Him freely give us all things?"

In some ways the Lord Jesus, the Eternal Son of God, is subordinate to God the Father in His role in the Trinity (cf., e.g., 1 Cor. 11:3; 15:27, 28), but He is fully deity with God the Father and God the Holy Spirit (I have four papers dealing with the Trinity or God the Father and God the Son on my internet site: "Who Do We Worship?"; "Who Do We Pray To?"; "The Name Yahweh and God the Father and God the Son"; and "More on the Trinity"; Google to Karl Kemp Teaching).]]

May this paper fully accomplish the purposes of God and be a blessing to His people. In Jesus' name.

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