

# Series: Together Toward Maturity

Inductive Bible Study Guide: 1 Corinthians 3:1-15



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## Step 1: Observation – What does the passage say?

Read **1 Corinthians 3:1–15** slowly and carefully, more than once. Let yourself really see what's there before trying to interpret it.

### Observation Prompts:

- Who is being spoken to, and how are they described?
  - What metaphors or images does Paul use?
  - What is said about building, foundations, and judgment?
  - Are any warnings or promises included?
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### Read the passage and take note of the following:

1. How does Paul describe the Corinthians in verses 1–4?

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2. What behaviors does Paul connect with spiritual immaturity?

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3. What metaphors does Paul use to describe ministry in verses 5–9?

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4. What is said about the foundation in verses 10–11?

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5. What materials are used in the building metaphor (vv.12–15)? What happens to each?

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## Step 2: Interpretation – What does the passage mean?

Now we explore what the passage means within the context of Paul’s letter and the broader message of the gospel.

### Context:

Paul is calling out the Corinthians for their **jealousy, division, and spiritual immaturity**. They’ve been treating ministry leaders like celebrities and clinging to personalities rather than the gospel. Paul reminds them that **only Jesus is the true foundation**, and everything we build on that foundation will be tested.

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### Questions to Explore:

1. What does it mean to be “people of the flesh” (v.1) and not ready for solid food?

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2. Why is it dangerous to cling to human leaders like Paul, Apollos, or Cephas? What does that reveal about spiritual pride?

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3. According to Paul, who really causes spiritual growth? (v.6–7)

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4. What is the significance of each person building on **the foundation of Christ** (v.10–11)?

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5. What do the materials (gold, silver, hay, straw, etc.) represent in verses 12–15?  
What does it mean for our work to be “tested by fire”?

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6. What reward is mentioned for those whose work endures?  
What happens to those whose work burns?

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### Word Study Suggestions:

- **Fleshly** (v.3): Greek *sarkikos* — driven by natural desires, worldly.
- **Foundation** (v.11): Greek *themelios* — a base layer for building, foundational truth.
- **Reward** (v.14): Greek *misthos* — wages, fruit, outcome of labor.
- **Tested by fire** (v.13): Refers to **God’s judgment**—revealing the true quality of our work.

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### Step 3: Application – How should I respond?

This passage invites us to examine the **quality and motive** behind the life we're building on Jesus. Are we seeking His glory, or our own?

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### **Personal Reflection:**

1. Am I still living spiritually immature—focused on myself, my preferences, or division?

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2. How do I view leaders or ministries? Do I idolize personalities, or seek Christ?

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3. What kind of “materials” am I building with in my life, home, or ministry?  
(Gold and silver = eternal things; wood and straw = temporary things.)

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4. What would it look like to build intentionally with things that last?

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5. How can I cultivate humility in how I serve, lead, or follow?

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## Summary Truths:

- **Spiritual maturity** is marked by unity, humility, and dependence on God.
  - Ministry is **God's work** — we plant and water, but He causes growth.
  - Our lives and service will be **tested** — only what's built on Christ will last.
  - Every believer is building something. The question is: **What are you building, and why?**
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## Optional Memory Verse:

*“For no one can lay a foundation other than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ.”*  
— 1 Corinthians 3:11 (ESV)

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## Prayer Prompt:

“Jesus, You are the foundation of my life. Help me build with what will last. Burn away anything that's just for show, and teach me to live and lead in a way that honors You and strengthens others.”

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## For Further Study:

- Matthew 7:24–27 — Building on the rock vs. the sand
- Romans 12:1–2 — Living as a spiritual offering
- Colossians 3:23–24 — Working for the Lord, not for man