

“Carne Vale”

1 Corinthians 3

Hymns: #23 Praise My Soul The King of Heaven

#263 The Churches One Foundation

Reading: 1 Corinthians 3

Barnum & Baily...Frank Lloyd Wright. What comes into your mind when you hear these names? If you are a regular cinema attender, which I am not, you may recognize Barnum & Baily as the principle figures of the recently released film “The Greatest Showman”. The film is inspired by the story of P. T. Barnum's creation of the Barnum & Bailey Circus and the lives of its star attractions. But if you're a bit older, which I am, what may come into your mind when you hear the name Barnum & Baily is the childhood memory of “The Big Top”, the tent inside which the famous “three ring circus” entertainment happened. Flying trapeze performers, clowns, lion tamers and a myriad of other mesmerizing acrobatic feats all took place under the “The Big Top”.

But what about Frank Lloyd Wright? Frank Lloyd Wright was an early 20th century modern American architect who became prolific and innovative in his design of homes and buildings. He designed more than 1,000 structures, 532 of which were actually built. Wright developed a style known as the “Prairie School”, which strove for an “organic architecture” in designs for homes and commercial buildings. By the mid-1930s, approaching 70 years of age, Wright appeared to have peacefully retired, before suddenly bursting back onto the public stage to design many of the greatest buildings of his life. Wright announced his return to the profession in dramatic fashion in 1935 with “Fallingwater”, a residence for Pittsburgh's acclaimed Kaufmann family. Shockingly original and astonishingly beautiful, Fallingwater is marked by a series of cantilevered balconies and terraces constructed atop a waterfall in rural southwestern Pennsylvania. It remains one of Wright's most celebrated works, a national landmark widely considered one of the most beautiful homes ever built.

<https://media.architecturaldigest.com/photos/57571c84e84281483697495d/master/pass/fallingwater-frank-lloyd-wright.jpg>

Barnum & Baily and Frank Lloyd Wright were both easily recognizable by the structures they erected and both captured the imaginations of people. Barnum & Baily erected a temporary circus tent that captured the imaginations of children. Frank Lloyd Wright erected permanent homes and buildings that captured the imagination of the mature. Let me ask you a question: In which of these two structures would you like live? Let me ask you perhaps a more penetrating question: In which of these two structures are you living right now?

In this third chapter of 1 Corinthians, the Apostle Paul is going to highlight this contrast as he seeks to move the boasting baby believers at Corinth and ourselves out from under the “Big Top” of childish immaturity and into the “Building” of maturing sons. As we follow Paul in chapter 3 we are going to see the “Carnival at Corinth”, the “Construction on Christ” and the “Composite Claim of Christians”.

1. The Carnival at Corinth (V. 1-9) *“Brothers, I could not address you as spiritual but as worldly--mere infants in Christ. 2I gave you milk, not solid food, for you were not yet ready for it. Indeed, you are still not ready. 3You are still worldly. For since there is jealousy and quarreling among you, are you not worldly? Are you not acting like mere men? 4For when one says, “I follow Paul,” and another, “I follow Apollos,” are you not mere men? 5What, after all, is Apollos? And what is Paul? Only servants, through whom you came to believe--as the Lord has assigned to each his task. 6I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God made it grow. 7So neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God, who makes things grow. 8The man who plants and the man who waters have one*

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purpose, and each will be rewarded according to his own labor. 9For we are God's fellow workers; you are God's field, God's building.”

Last week we saw that Paul divided human beings into three classes of people where in chapter 2 he contrasted the difference between the natural, unregenerate man, the psuchikos- the man without “cable” and the spiritual, born-again man, the pneumatikos- the man with cable. Now he is going to turn our attention to the third class of people, the carnal, fleshly man, the sarkikos. This is the baby believer who has “cable” but doesn’t listen to it or watch it.

Paul addresses the Corinthians here as being the third class of people, they were “carnal” (KJV). The word carnal comes from the Latin and French word “carna” which means sensual. We get our word carnival from this word. A carnival and a circus are synonymous to most of us today. But it’s interesting that carnival is actually made up of two words, carne and vale...literally meaning “flesh farewell”. Down in New Orleans or Rio de Janeiro and other parts of the world, carnival has become associated with the season of Lent. Historically, Lent has been a time when one takes on certain disciplines to practice “farewell to the flesh” by denying certain pleasure to the flesh. But ironically, natural and worldly men turned the season leading up to Lent from true “carne vale” into a debauched “carnival” and circus atmosphere. In New Orleans and Rio, the Tuesday before Lent is Mardi Gras, meaning “Fat Tuesday”, when people gorge their flesh, get drunk, nude and satiate the flesh in every way possible as a kind of last big indulgence before they supposedly say “carne vale” to their flesh for the six weeks of Lent. Here in Australia, Mardi Gras is even more debased, being primarily a celebration of homosexuality.

Paul was addressing the Corinthians as this kind of carnal. They were living under the “Big Top” like kids at a three ring circus and worse were living like every day was “fat Tuesday”. They were carnal-sarkikos. Now, you may be thinking...“Well, I’m not a carnal Christian. I don’t participate in Mardi Gras or indulge my flesh like that.” But, before you check out on this, look at v. 3 and 4 again, “since there is jealousy and quarreling among you, are you not carnal? Are you not acting like mere men? 4For when one says, “I follow Paul,” and another, “I follow Apollos,” are you not mere men?” Paul is saying here that jealousy, quarrelling and denominating around men are just as much the marks of the carnal flesh as is Mardi Gras or Carnival. Jealousy is defined as “feeling or showing an envious resentment of someone for their achievements, possessions, or perceived advantages.” And quarrelling here is literally “eris” meaning wrangling, contention, a readiness for debate, strife, or variance.¹ Let us take stock and ask ourselves: Am I jealous of someone else’s gifts or provision or life style? Am I always “loaded for bear” and looking for a contentious argument with someone over my conviction about something? If so, you are acting carnally. But not only that, you are missing out.

Paul says he wanted to give the Corinthians the solid food of deeper and more glorious riches in Christ but all he could give them was milk because they were still mere infants – literally νηπίους nepiois. They were still in nappies- nepios, they were not ready for solid food when Paul wrote his first letter and indeed they were still not ready. They hadn’t grown. And as a result, they were missing out, still stuck on the bottle. There is nothing wrong with babies, bottles and nappies. But when you see a fully grown adult in nappies, sucking a bottle inside a play pen in the middle of the living room, you know something is desperately wrong and it is gut wrenchingly sad.

Paul then reminds them of what he raised back in chapter one, namely that the men they are so keen to follow and splinter the Body of Christ over are simply the means, not the cause, whereby the Corinthians believed. Paul was a planter and Apollos was a waterer, but it was God who had given

¹ Strong’s Exhaustive Concordance # 2054

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the Corinthians life and it was God who could make them grow. Paul says that he and Apollos were fellow workers together with God and that the Corinthians were God’s field. He then shifts the metaphor from a field to a building. The Corinthians were God’s building. In effect Paul is saying “Folks, the “Big Top” is coming down. The circus is leaving town. Now it’s time grow up and come home...and the home you have is a building, the design of which makes Frank Lloyd Wright’s structures seem like Lego Land.” Let us look at this building, its foundation and its construction.

2. Construction on Christ (v. 10-17) *“10By the grace God has given me, I laid a foundation as an expert builder, and someone else is building on it. But each one should be careful how he builds. 11For no one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ. 12If any man builds on this foundation using gold, silver, costly stones, wood, hay or straw, 13his work will be shown for what it is, because the Day will bring it to light. It will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test the quality of each man's work. 14If what he has built survives, he will receive his reward. 15If it is burned up, he will suffer loss; he himself will be saved, but only as one escaping through the flames. 16Don't you know that you yourselves are God's temple and that God's Spirit lives in you? 17If anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy him; for God's temple is sacred, and you are that temple.”*

Paul tells the Corinthians, and us, that God had given him a particular gift, a gift he describes here as an expert builder. Literally, he says he is as a σοφὸς ἀρχιτέκτων- a wise architect. Paul is not like Hugh Jackman in the “Greatest Showman” running a three ring circus for carnal Christians. No, he is a wise architect, more like Frank Lloyd Wright who built permanent structures with organic design, in which the maturing sons of God live and grow in the grace and knowledge of Jesus Christ.

I find it quite amazing and a fitting application that Frank Lloyd Wright is quoted as saying: “Form follows function – but that has been misunderstood. Form and function should be one, joined in a spiritual union.” See if you cannot detect the spiritual union of form and function in these two passages.

Eph. 2:19-22, “Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and aliens, but fellow citizens with God's people and members of God's household, 20built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone. 21In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord. 22And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit.” The form here is that of a temple, the function of which is to be a dwelling place of God by His Spirit.

1 Pet. 2:5 “you also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.” The form here is that of a spiritual house, the function of which is to offer spiritual sacrifices, as we declare each week in the Eucharist.

We cannot separate our form from our function in this temple-building, for we are in fact “living stones”, indwelt by the very One whom we are being built together to be indwelt by. Form and Function in a spiritual union.

Paul is a master architect, gifted by God, and the foundation he laid is Christ himself, as we saw last week in his resolve to know nothing amongst the Corinthians but Christ and Him crucified. He has shared with us the “blueprints” in his letters and he tells us that each one should be careful how “he builds” on this foundation because our work is going to be tested by fire. Let’s stop here for a minute and clarify some basics. First, you and I do not lay foundations. That is an apostolic gift that has already been laid. It is Jesus Christ himself who has been established as the foundation in our lives

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through the apostolic testimony within the Scriptures. Second, we are each one building on that foundation. “Building” on the foundation then means that we are adorning Christ. We are adorning Him by our corporate living and being built together as we just read in Eph. 2:22. But we are also adorning Him with the quality of the materials we employ in that corporate building process. Third, the quality of this work of ours going to be tested and shown for what it really was one day. Fourth, there are rewards to be gained for building well. And lastly, the entire context of our building with gold, silver and precious stones and the rewards to be won, is in the context of our corporate temple building. In other words, it’s the quality of how truly invested you were to the true building of the Body Christ in fulfilment of Eph. 2 and 1 Peter 2 that will be tested.

So then what does it mean to build, to adorn Christ in His corporate Body with gold, silver and costly stones, wood, hay or straw? I’m not sure that we can fully exhaust the exact meaning of each of these images, but let me suggest two answers. One from a Trinitarian perspective and one from a textual perspective.

From a Trinitarian perspective gold, silver and costly stones signify, as one biblical expositor has described them as, “the various experiences of Christ in the virtues and attributes of the Triune God. It is with these that the apostles and all spiritual believers build the church on the unique foundation of Christ. Gold may signify the divine nature of the Father with all His attributes, silver may signify the redeeming Christ with all the virtues and attributes of His person and work, and the precious stones may signify the work of the Holy Spirit with all His attributes. All these precious materials are the products of our participation in and the enjoyment of Christ in our spirit through the Holy Spirit. Only these are good for God’s building.”²

From a textual perspective, and perhaps a bit more of a coal face application, I would suggest that gold represents our personal devotional life to Jesus Christ. It was gold that the Magi presented to Jesus as an expression of their personal devotion, (Matt. 2:11) having asked “Where is the one who has been born King of the Jews. We have seen His star in the east and have come to worship Him”. (Matt. 2:2). Silver represents the words of our mouths; the overflow of our heart out of which the mouth speaks and our disciplined speech. Proverbs 10:20 says “The tongue of the righteous is choice silver” and Proverbs 25:11 says “A word apply spoken is like apples of gold in settings of silver”. The subjects our mouths talk about when we’re together can truly be silver. Finally, precious stones represents our priestly life particularly in the intercessory role of prayer. In Exodus 28 we read of the use of precious stones used in the priestly garments. Two onyx stones were engraved with the names of the twelve tribes of Israel, six on each stone and were attached to the shoulders of the ephod which the priest wore. In addition, we see that the breastplate was mounted with twelve precious stones, each engraved with the names of the sons of Israel (Ex. 28:17-20). So we see that whenever Aaron entered the Holy Place before God as priest, he bore his brothers both upon his shoulders and his heart. (Ex. 28:12; 29). Bearing each other’s burdens with a heart of compassion before the throne of grace in prayer is surely a precious stone with which we can build today.

But equally, Paul says that it is possible to adorn the Body of Christ with wood, hay and straw. These are natural, cheap, and readily available elements. Moreover, they are also the more visible. People who build primarily so that their efforts can be seen by men are wasting their time. Remember, a little piece of gold or a gem stone is not nearly as visible as a haystack...but which one is most at risk to a single match? Paul says it’s more than a match that is going to test our works, it will be a

² *Witness Lee; New Testament Recovery Version; Living Stream Ministries; 1986; 1 Corinthians 3:12² note; p. 692*

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refiner’s fire. Wood, hay and straw will be burned up resulting in loss to the believer. But gold, silver and precious stones will remain resulting in reward.

What exactly are these rewards promised to those who adorn the Body of Christ in this life well? Again, I don’t know that we can fully understand the full measure or kinds of rewards that await us. But we do know of at least five rewards that are mentioned in the scriptures that are described as a crowning reward. Crowns are the symbols of the reign and rule of kings. And amazingly, the scriptures declare that reigning and ruling with Jesus as kings is just what these five crown rewards represent to us. Consider these few passages:

- ...if we endure, we will also reign with him (2 Tim. 2:12)
- You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to serve our God, and they will reign on the earth. (Rev. 5:10)
- Blessed and holy are those who have part in the first resurrection. The second death has no power over them, but they will be priests of God and of Christ and will reign with him for a thousand years (Rev. 20:6)
- ...the Lord God will give them light. And they will reign for ever and ever. (Rev. 22:5)
- "I tell you the truth, at the renewal of all things, when the Son of Man sits on his glorious throne, you who have followed me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel. (Matt. 19:28)
- To him who overcomes, I will give the right to sit with me on my throne, just as I overcame and sat down with my Father on his throne. (Rev. 3:21)

So what are the five crowns associated with these “reigning” passages and by what criteria are they to be gained:

1. **Imperishable Crown-** (1Cor. 9:25) Self-control of the body; victory over the flesh; train yourself to be godly and walking your talk.
2. **Crown of Boasting-** (1 Thes. 2:19) Fruitful labour in the lives of others.
3. **Crown of Righteousness-** (2 Tim 4:8) Living righteously in longing anticipation of His return
4. **Crown of Life-** (James 1:12; Rev. 2:10) Remaining faithful under trial
5. **Crown of Glory-** (1 Pet. 5:4) Faithful and willing Shepherds of the flock who set an example for others and don’t lord it over them.

Jesus encourages us and warns us regarding our crowns when He said: “I am coming soon. Hold on to what you have, so that no one will take your crown” (Rev.3:11). Sounds to me like we can gain them only to lose them, so let’s be vigilant and hold on. Millennial Kingdom and New Heaven/New Earth responsibilities are to be had or lost, so let’s keep our eyes on the long game.

There is so much more to be said about all this than time will allow, but let me give just one more thought about crowns. It is often taught that the crowns we receive will one day be given back and laid before the throne at the feet of Jesus never to be our own possession again. But if we pay close attention to Rev. 4:8-11, we see that the laying of our crowns before the throne is an enduring act of worship. It’s “whenever” the living creatures begin their act of worship that our crown laying begins. And this “whenever” appears to be an unceasing act of worship that occurs both by day and by night.

Paul now asks one of his frequently used “Do you not know” questions. He employs this phrase a solid ten times in this letter alone. When Paul asks “Do you not know” it is a diplomatic way of saying “You guys clearly have no idea about this” and “each time it (he) introduces an indisputable

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statement”.³ Here in v.16 he asks “16Don't you know that you (Plural) yourselves are God's temple and that God's Spirit lives in you (plural)?” I would paraphrase this section as “You Corinthians have no idea what you’re missing. Together you all are God’s Temple-Building, so stop the dangerous pulling apart of this sacred building. God doesn’t take kindly those who destroy what He is doing among yourselves.”

Notice Paul’s other “Don’t you knows”:

- Don't you know that a little yeast works through the whole batch of dough? 5:6
- Do you not know that the saints will judge the world? 6:2
- Do you not know that we will judge angels? How much more the things of this life! 6:3
- Do you not know that the wicked will not inherit the kingdom of God? 6:9
- Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ himself? 6:15
- Do you not know that he who unites himself with a prostitute is one with her in body? 6:16
- Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? 6:19
- Don't you know that those who work in the temple get their food from the temple, and those who serve at the altar share in what is offered on the altar? 14In the same way, the Lord has commanded that those who preach the gospel should receive their living from the gospel. 9:13-14
- Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one gets the prize? Run in such a way as to get the prize. 9:24

Paul now makes his final plea to motivate the boasting baby believers to stop dividing over men and move out from under the Big Top Circus environment into the Temple Building of God as Sons. His plea urges them to come to grips with a significant and overlooked fact, namely that all things are theirs already.

3. The Composite Claim of Christians (V. 18-22) *“Do not deceive yourselves. If any one of you thinks he is wise by the standards of this age, he should become a “fool” so that he may become wise. 19For the wisdom of this world is foolishness in God's sight. As it is written: “He catches the wise in their craftiness; 20and again, “The Lord knows that the thoughts of the wise are futile.”21So then, no more boasting about men! All things are yours, 22whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas or the world or life or death or the present or the future--all are yours, 23and you are of Christ, and Christ is of God.”*

In v. 21 Paul says emphatically, “All things are yours”. What exactly are these “all things”? Primarily, they are all the gifted men they have been dividing over. There is no need to divide because they are all theirs. All three of these men were apostolically God gifted and given men to the Corinthians, and each one of them should have been fully embraced. But the Corinthian were allowing their immature preferences for “style” to cause them to reject the gifts other men had to bring to them. If one or two of these men had been teaching error, then dividing would have been the right thing to do. But they weren’t. These men were from God and what they taught was from God.

There is a valuable lesson and application for us to learn here and one which requires us to grow up and be discerning to apply. While we must be careful to recognize truth from error and act accordingly, we must not allow our preference for denomination or style cause us to be unwilling to accept other brothers and sisters or learn from the teaching of other men.

³ David K. Lowry; *1 Corinthians; The Bible Knowledge Commentary- An Exposition of the Scriptures by Dallas Seminary Faculty*; 1983; SP Publications (p.512)

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J Vernon McGee said of his own experience many years ago, “Oh, how wonderful it is that we do not have to be confined to one narrow group or one particular denomination. Instead of feeling that we belong to so-and-so and can be taught by only one particular teacher preacher, we can know that all the men of God belong to us. How wonderful! The reason I get along with the Pentecostal brethren is because I know they belong to God. Oh my friend, those folk belong to me too. And I belong to them. How glorious it is to meet around the person of Christ with other believers who are on the foundation which is Jesus Christ!”⁴

With over 20,800 Christian denominations, Christendom leaved to the hilt with counterfeits and doctrinal error rampant amongst many teachers, I have likened the discernment required for application of this process to be something akin to eating a small brown trout. There are lots of small bones in there and if you hoe into it like you’re eating a Big Mac, you are soon going to be choking on bones so fine that an emergency room visit is probably going to be in order. But with a discerning palate, small brown trout are sweet and delicious. I can personally attest to the fact that some of the most beautiful and helpful adornments in my Christian life have come to me from eating small brown trout; that is, from those outside my own tradition.

Paul tells the Corinthians that not only are he, Apollos and Peter all theirs, but so is life and death and the present and the future. This all-encompassing composite claim of Christians is the result of the work of Jesus Christ who by His Incarnation, Life, Death, Resurrection and Ascension has established an objective union so intimate that it can only be described as being “of Christ” and “Christ being of God”. Jesus said in John 14:20 “On that day you will realize that I am in my Father, and you are in me, and I am in you” and in John 17, Jesus prayed “Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us...I in them and you in me. May they be brought to complete unity to let the world know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me.” This chapter closes with Paul making this final point: “The vertical unity with God, established by Christ alone, is the sole basis for our horizontal unity with each other. It is a done deal. So stop living as if it isn’t. If Christ is present, the foundation is laid. Now grow up and build well.”

Let us say a true Amen to Paul’s instruction in this chapter, by saying not “Carnival” but “Carne Vale” “Flesh farewell”.

Let’s pray...

⁴ J. Vernon McGee; *1 Corinthians; Through The Bible Books; Pasadena Cal; 1977; p. 47*