

# **In Defense of Biblical Christianity**

## **Article 7**

### **1Cor 3:1-21 Saved Through Fire**

### **The Once-Saved-Always-Saved Heresy**

**A Paper**

**By`**

**Bill Seney/Break Free Apologetics**

This apologetic paper is the seventh of a series of articles titled “In Defense of Biblical Christianity.” I will be challenging false doctrines that have infiltrated, subverted, and perverted the truth of Biblical Christianity.

## Apologetic Preface

The following apologetic defence proves beyond all reasonable doubt that the popular evangelical interpretation of **1 Cor 3:1-21** is not based on Biblical exegesis, but rather eisegesis is in play to defend Calvinistic interpretations of the scriptures.

The main text used to promote Calvinistic doctrine in this chapter is **1 Cor 3:15**, which says- *“If anyone’s work is burned up, he will suffer loss, though he himself will be saved, but only by fire.”*

Calvinists use this text as proof of eternal security and once-saved-always-saved. They teach that this text is evidence that even if every work of your entire Christian walk is burned on judgment day you will still be saved.

I assure you their interpretation is entirely off the mark. They are misappropriating the text and applying it to individual believers when the entire context is about the teachers whom the Corinthians are elevating, causing division in the church.

### I intend to prove this from the scriptures.

The Biblical defence of the text will be articulated based on the structure of the arguments that Paul has provided us, shown below:

3:1-4 Divisions in the Church

3:5-9 The Agricultural Metaphor

3:10-15 The Construction Metaphor

3:16-17 Temple Destruction

3:18-20 Wisdom and Folly

3:21 Textual Conclusion- Do Not Trust in the Wisdom of Man

## Biblical Defence

I will provide a biblical explanation of the entire chapter without imposing pre-suppositions to elevate a school of theology over the clear teaching of scripture.

Please pay special attention to the bolded keywords and, if underlined, even more attention because Paul is articulating critical theology.

### Divisions in the Church 3:1-4

*1 But I, brothers, **could not** address you as **spiritual people**, but as people of the flesh, as infants in Christ. 2 I fed you with milk, not solid food, for you were **not ready for it**. And even now you are **not yet ready**, 3for you are still of the flesh. For while there is jealousy and strife among*

*you, are you not of the flesh and behaving only in a **human way**? 4 For when one says, “**I follow Paul,**” and another, “**I follow Apollos,**” are you not **being merely human**?*

#### **Here Observe:**

1. The brothers are unspiritual, fleshly behaving as infants, merely human.
2. They were fed milk and still are not ready for food.
3. They are still walking in the flesh:
  - i. With jealousy and strife
  - ii. Behaving like mere humans, not as those who have the Spirit
  - iii. They were elevating one teacher vs another
    - i. Some followed Paul, Apollos or others; this is being merely human.

Reading the entire epistle reveals the enormity of issues in the Corinthian church. The main connecting point in all their problems is identified in vs 1-4 --they are unspiritual, fleshly, like infants and merely human.

In 1 Corinthians chapter 3, Paul addresses the divisions, jealousy and strife in the church caused by apostle worship. Paul will use his mastery of rhetoric to challenge this behaviour. Paul's argument advances.

### **Agricultural Metaphor 3:5-9**

*5 What then is Apollos? What is Paul? **Servants** through whom **you** believed, as the Lord assigned to each. 6 I **planted**, Apollos **watered**, but **God gave the growth**. 7 So neither he who plants nor he who waters is **anything**, but only God who gives the growth. 8 He who plants and he who waters are one, and each will **receive his wages according to his labor**. 9 **For we** are **God's fellow workers**. You are **God's field**, **God's building**.*

#### **Here Observe:**

1. Paul, Apollos, and other church leaders are only servants through whom they believed.
2. One servant planted, one waters, but God gives the growth.
3. He who plants and he who waters are one;
  - i. They will receive their wages according to their labor.
4. Paul and Apollos are fellow workers.
5. The (believers) are God's field, God's building.

Right away, we see Paul addressing the issue at hand; he says apostles are servants who are not to be the cause of division. He says Paul and Apollos are servants through whom you believe; they are one, one planted and the other watered, and are working together for you.

An essential phrase in the text is “*each will receive his wages according to his labor*”. This is a clear indicator that the giving of money was tied to the phrase, I follow Paul, or I follow Apollos.

Paul is saying this is also wrong; we all work for you and should receive fair compensation for our labour.

Paul summarized his rhetoric: “*For **we are** fellow workers, but **you are** God’s field, God’s Building.*”

To interpret the ongoing scripture correctly, you must understand the short phrases **we are**, and **you are** in this text. The apostles are the **we are** and they are doing the work. The **you are** the believers; they are the field and building and are not doing the work.

Misunderstanding this passage is why the Calvinists misinterpret the passage. They have transferred the work from the servants to the field and building.

Paul continues to build his argument using a construction metaphor. Now, remember Paul is using rhetoric to prove apostle worship is wrong.

## Construction Metaphor 3:10-15

*10According to the grace of God **given to me**, like a skilled **master builder** I laid a foundation, and **someone else is building upon it**. Let each one **take care how he builds upon it**. 11 For no one can lay **a foundation** other than that which is laid, **which is Jesus Christ**. 12 Now if anyone **builds on** the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw— 13each one’s **work will become manifest**, for the Day will disclose it, because it will **be revealed by fire**, and the **fire will test** what sort of work each one has done. 14If the work that anyone has built on the foundation **survives**, **he will receive a reward**. 15 If anyone’s work is burned up, he will suffer loss, though he himself will be **saved**, but only as through fire.*

### Here Observe:

1. The servant Paul has the grace of God, and he, like a master builder, laid the foundation; in other words, he led them to Christ.
2. The reference to someone else building upon it certainly includes Apollos and those beyond him.
3. Paul, Apollos and others must take care of how they build upon the foundation.
  - i. Paul emphatically states the foundation is Jesus Christ.
4. Paul then addresses building on the foundation.
  - i. If gold, silver, precious stone, wood, hay, or straw, their work will become manifest.
  - ii. What they build will be disclosed on judgment day and revealed through the fire, as the fire will test the work each of them has done.
  - iii. The purity of the work is the point of discussion. For example, fire will remove the impurities of the gold nugget, leaving only pure gold.
5. If the work built on the foundation of Christ passes through the fire and survives, the person will receive a reward.

6. If the work built on the foundation is burned up, he will suffer loss, though he will be saved only through fire.

Let's recap before I expound on what was just said.

The unspiritual and immature Corinthians were elevating God's servants one over the other, causing division in the Church. Paul addresses this issue by presenting an agricultural metaphor where God gives the servants in the field grace to plant and water Christ in their hearts, leading them to conversion and spiritual growth. Paul then closes the first phase of his argument with you are "God's field and God's building." (Not doing the work)

Paul then compares himself to a master builder because he was commissioned to build the Corinthian church. Paul laid the foundation. We know this is true from the Book of **Acts 18:1-11** which explains how Paul founded the Corinthian church and that he stayed with them for 18 months. We also know Apollos advanced the work of Paul at Corinth from **Acts 18:27-19:1a**.

Then Paul compares their work to gold, silver, precious stones, hay or straw. Their work that passes through the fire can only be the purity of their teaching, conduct and discipleship. The hay and straw will not make it through the fire.

If they build poorly on the foundation of Christ, they will suffer loss and will not be rewarded.

Paul is making it clear that if the servants are not perfect in teaching, conduct, and discipleship, it will not result in a loss of salvation.

The critical thing to understand in this text is that the work is not the responsibility of God's field or building. The work is the work of the servants who plant, water and build. (This certainly proves Calvinistic claims to the text false!)

From here Paul transitions his rhetoric to the accountability of the teachers moving beyond rewards and suffering loss.

## **Temple Destruction 3:16-17**

16 Do you not know that **you are God's temple** and that **God's Spirit dwells in you**? 17 If anyone destroys God's temple, **God will destroy him**. For God's **temple is holy**, and **you are that temple**.

### **Here Observe:**

1. Paul says they are not just any building. They are God's temple because God's Holy Spirit dwells in them.
2. If anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy them because God's temple is holy, and they are that temple.

Paul is issuing a tremendous warning to any teacher or individual who plays any role in the destruction of the temple, which is God's people.

Do not miss this: Paul is dogmatically stating the opposite of once-saved-always-saved. He says God will destroy anyone who destroys God's temple.

This verse is not an accidental placement? Paul just finished talking about being a master builder and now he articulated the consequences for those who destroy the temple. The question now becomes how you build God's building and how you destroy it.

The answer is found in verse ten, where Paul said, "Let each one take care of how you build upon the foundation, and in verse 11, *he said Christ was the foundation*. Therefore, the construction and demolition are based on the purity of their work, including their teachings, their lives, and their leadership authority by holding people accountable to the teachings (discipleship).

Further evidence of this warning is in the following verses.

## Wisdom and Folly 3:18-20

**18** *Let no one deceive himself. If anyone among you thinks that he is wise in this age, let him become a fool that he may become wise.* **19** *For the wisdom of this world is folly with God. For it is written, "He catches the wise in their craftiness,"* **20** *and again, "The Lord knows the thoughts of the wise, that they are futile."*

### Here Observe:

1. Paul extends his warning by saying, "Let *no one deceive himself*."
2. If you think you are wise, with the wisdom of the age, let him become a fool because:
  - i. The wisdom of this world is folly with God.
  - ii. God catches the wise through their craftiness
  - iii. The Lord knows the thoughts of the wise, they are futile.

Paul is warning those deceiving themselves into believing they are teaching God's wisdom. He attacks them because they are not articulating the wisdom of God but of men. The result of such teaching is the destruction of the temple of God. Notice the words "let no one deceive himself."

How could they deceive themselves? Paul gives us the answer. These teachers have elevated the wisdom of the ages. Learned men had come into the church and were teaching the wisdom of the age but not the wisdom of God. This work is not about rewards or suffering loss, this work will result in God destroying these teachers.

Paul provides an unmistakable picture of what God thinks about the wisdom of men. He says it is folly, crafty and futile and will destroy God's temple (his people).

This is precisely what we have going on with the Calvinistic interpretation of this text. They have brought the wisdom of the ages into the church; in this case, the ancient wisdom is pagan fatalism.

Do not be deceived. This text has nothing to do with the believer's eternal security. I have proven the opposite. Now, the icing on the cake that proves the entire context of chapter three is not about the believer's eternal security.

### **Text Conclusion 3:21**

**21 So let no one boast in men.** For all things are yours, <sup>22</sup>whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas **or** the world or life or death or the present or the future—all are yours, <sup>23</sup>and you are Christ's, and Christ is God's.

#### **Here Observe:**

1. Another warning, "*let no one boast in men*," which is a summation of his foundational argument that people who boast about men are unspiritual, fleshly and immature (vs 1-4)
2. He then tells them why they should not boast in men:
  - i. For all things are yours
    - i. Paul, Apollos, or Cephas
    - ii. The world of life or death
    - iii. The present or the future all are yours
3. You are Christ's, and Christ is God's.

Here, Paul emphasizes the futility of boasting in men with worldly wisdom and the futility of worshipping the Apostles. The accurate boast is "that in Christ all things are yours." Everything belongs to those who belong to Christ.

This is Godly wisdom.

### **Conclusion**

I exegeted the entire chapter, revealing that 1 Corinthians has nothing to do with the believer's eternal security. The text reveals that individual believers are not the subject of this text; therefore, the text has nothing to do with Calvinistic claims.

Here is what the text revealed in summation.

The Corinthian church was elevating men and the wisdom of men. The apostle called them unspiritual, immature, mere humans and infants. This immaturity was causing jealousy and strife in the church and ultimately could cause the temple to be destroyed, which would force God to destroy those who destroy the temple.

Paul used two metaphors, the agricultural and the construction metaphors, to reveal that the leaders in the church are servants of Christ working for their salvation. He says their work must pass the purity test by going through the fire on judgment day. They will be rewarded for pure works and suffer loss for impure works, but their salvation is not on the table.

For several reasons, significant warnings are given to those who want to bring the world's wisdom into the church. First, God considers the wisdom of man folly, craftiness and futility. Second, it results in strife and jealousy; third, it destroys the temple of God.

These three negative reasons are why Paul says, "Let *no one boast in men.*"

Paul closes the argument with a positive. He says, "*All things are yours,*" the apostles, the world, and the future because you belong to Christ.

Paul is saying that the immature and fleshly elevate men and the wisdom of men. The mature focus on Christ, especially that everything belongs to his faithful followers in Him.

I trust I have proven that the Calvinistic proof text has nothing to do with their doctrine of faith alone or the believer's eternal security.

I repeat Paul's instructions and warnings:

1. Do not be merely human; be spiritual.
2. If you destroy God's temple, God will destroy you.
3. Do not elevate leaders beyond servants' status.
4. Do not elevate the wisdom of men.
5. Let no one deceive himself with worldly wisdom.
6. Do not boast in men; boast in Christ.
7. You are God's field, building/temple; you are holy; act accordingly.

I want to take your text comprehension to the next level: ownership and articulation.

A summary review of critical sections of the text has been provided below. I trust this will help cement the truth of this teaching in your mind.

The Church is elevating men, proving they are fleshly, unspiritual (3:1-4)

Jesus Christ is the Foundation of Christianity (3:11)

Apollos & Paul are Servant (3:5), Paul planted the Church (3:6), Apollos watered (3:6), God provides the growth (3:6-7)

Wages will be given for labour (3:8)

Apollos & Paul are fellow works; the Church is God's Field, God's Building (3:9)



Paul is a Master Builder building on the foundation of Christ; others build on the foundation, and there is no other foundation to build upon (3:10-11)

Works are the efforts of the builders building (3:10)

The purity of the work that builds upon Christ the Foundation will be tested. (3:12)

Works will result in a reward or being burned up in the fire (3:13-15)

Works that destroy God's Temple (people in the church) will result in God destroying the person who performs such works. (3:16-17)

The wisdom of the world elevates man and human wisdom; God will expose the futility of such thinking (3:18-20)

The conclusion proves the entire context of the teaching: "So let no one boast in men. (3:21a)

Paul, Apollos, Cephas, death, life, present, and future belong to the church. We belong to Christ; Christ belongs to God. (3:21b)

## **Bibliography**

ESV- English Standard Version -Bible Hub Software [www.biblehub.com](http://www.biblehub.com)