

## Series on First Corinthians

By Doug Hamilton

### Chapter 3: “The Strong Church”

In Acts 18, the apostle Paul arrived at Corinth for the first time. The following is the basic timeline of the account.

- He met Priscilla and Aquila following their expulsion from Rome, along with all the other Jews by Claudius Caesar (18:2).
- Working as tentmakers, Paul preached the gospel to the Jews every Sabbath for a short time until Silas, Timothy, and the other members of the mission team rejoined. Assisted with mission support from Philippi, he went full-time into the work to reach out to the gentiles (18:3-6).
- With the blessing and encouragement from God (*for I have many people in this city*), Paul stayed for about 18 months, teaching the word among the Corinthian Christians, laying a firm foundation of faith in Christ for this new congregation (18:11).
- When the pressure arose against Paul by some of the Jews, he moved on to complete his prosperous Second Missionary Journey by heading back to Caesarea (18:21-22).
- He had successfully completed what he set out to do in the first place, planting new congregations and strengthening.

Note: There was no mention of Apollos in the work of the Corinthian church at that time. The church at Corinth was already well-established for about three years. It was in that environment for which Apollos arrived.

Acts 18:23-28, And having spent some time *there*, he left and passed successively through the Galatian region and Phrygia, strengthening all the disciples. <sup>24</sup> Now a Jew named Apollos, an Alexandrian by birth, an eloquent man, came to Ephesus; and he was mighty in the Scriptures. <sup>25</sup> This man had been instructed in the way of the Lord; and being fervent in spirit, he was speaking and teaching accurately the things concerning Jesus, being acquainted only with the baptism of John; <sup>26</sup> and he began to speak out boldly in the synagogue. But when Priscilla and Aquila heard him, they took him aside and explained to him the way of God more accurately. <sup>27</sup> And when he wanted to go across to Achaia, the brethren encouraged him and wrote to the disciples to welcome him; and when he had arrived, he greatly helped those who had believed through grace, <sup>28</sup> for he powerfully refuted the Jews in public, demonstrating by the Scriptures that Jesus was the Christ.

It was on the third missionary journey which a disciple named Apollos was discovered by Priscilla and Aquila. Verses 24-25 stated he was...

- From Alexandria, the most educated city in the world. This city also had the largest library on the earth at the time. To say that you came from Alexandria meant something concerning mental preparedness.
- Was an eloquent man, demonstrating a high level of education.
- Mighty in the Scriptures, for he was well-versed in the Old Testament texts. He obviously had spent some time in study of the sacred writings.

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- Instructed in the way of the Lord, showing that he had been taught information from Christians along the way.
- Speaking and teaching accurately the things concerning Jesus, showing that He had learned much about the life and times of Christ.
- Was not properly taught concerning baptism, for he had only known of the obsolete baptism of John the baptist.

Priscilla and Aquila saw great potential in Apollos, recognizing him as a messenger of the gospel, but needing to talk with him privately about a flaw. They obviously explained to him the details of Christ's command to be baptized in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit for the remission of his sins. Combined with the fact that the first text in Acts 19 presents a similar situation, we must assume that Apollos was re-baptized after being shown a way of God more accurately (26).

After a lengthy discussion with Priscilla and Aquila, Apollos desired to go to a place where his skill set would be best used. It appears he was effective through public debate, being able shut down the hostile Jews that adamantly and openly worked against them (27-28). For more than three years, the Corinthian church had built their congregation on the firm foundation laid by Paul.

1 Corinthians 3:1-3, And I, brethren, could not speak to you as to spiritual men, but as to men of flesh, as to infants in Christ. <sup>2</sup> I gave you milk to drink, not solid food; for you were not yet able *to receive it*. Indeed, even now you are not yet able, <sup>3</sup> for you are still fleshly. For since there is jealousy and strife among you, are you not fleshly, and are you not walking like mere men?

In chapters 1 and 2, the Corinthians appeared divisive in their approach to each other. It was a culture who elevated great sophists speakers, demonstrating their superior debate skills. Apollos had taken the lead in the continuance of spiritual growth for the Corinthians and they began to see him as a more eloquent speaker than the apostle Paul.

Many of church members were downplaying Paul's apostleship based on his less eloquent style of speaking. *2 Corinthians 10:10 For they say, "His letters are weighty and strong, but his personal presence is unimpressive and his speech contemptible."* Equally, the Apostle Peter was lumped into the sophist rating system, being mentioned in 1:12. This would be dealt with in Paul's correspondence. The Corinthian church was a divided, dysfunctional, group. Within the remainder of the chapter are four thoughts that eliminate division from within a congregation.

Just like division occurred in the first-century Corinthian church, the same can happen to the twenty-first century church. How do churches effectively deal with division? There are 4 realizations God's people must embrace.

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### Dealing with Division in the Church

#### #1: Realize we are fellow-workers in God's Field.

1 Corinthians 3:5-9, What then is Apollos? And what is Paul? Servants through whom you believed, even as the Lord gave *opportunity* to each one. <sup>6</sup> I planted, Apollos watered, but God was causing the growth. <sup>7</sup> So then neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but God who causes the growth. <sup>8</sup> Now he who plants and he who waters are one; but each will receive his own reward according to his own labor. <sup>9</sup> For we are God's fellow workers; you are God's field, God's building.

Agriculture was great in ancient Corinth. Anyone living there at the time would have known this the basic horticulture concepts. Without planting seed and watering the fields, there would be no crop. The two primary human forces which aided in growth of the Corinthian church were Paul and Apollos. Paul brought the gospel, Apollos watered with teaching, but it was God who brought for the crop of new converts. Hence, as it is written, Paul planted, Apollos water, but it was God that caused the increase.

The church family is no different today, for we also are all working in the same field owned by a common Master with the hope of sharing in the crops. Some of us plant, some water, some fertilize, some weed and some harvest. We are ONE with the same purpose and must never forget it. Notice in verse 9 that he makes a transition from a field to a building. He is now furthering a similar thought by discussing the kingdom in building terms.

#### #2: Realize that we share the foundation of Christ.

1 Corinthians 3:10-15, According to the grace of God which was given to me, 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. <sup>11</sup> For no man can lay a foundation other than the one which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. <sup>12</sup> Now if any man builds on the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw, <sup>13</sup> each man's work will become evident; for the day will show it because it is *to be* revealed with fire, and the fire itself will test the quality of each man's work. <sup>14</sup> If any man's work which he has built on it remains, he will receive a reward. <sup>15</sup> If any man's work is burned up, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire.

The word that Paul uses to describe himself is ἀρχιτέκτων (architekton), being translated as an "architect". Today, architects professionals who draw up the plans for a structure. In the first-century, they were the ones who laid the foundation of the structure. In ancient Corinth, there were many of the great structures for which the foundations are still in place today.

Additionally, once a foundation was firmly placed, then a regular builder would begin his structure. He might use a variety of materials such as gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay and straw. If it were a lesser foundation, then the lesser materials would be used. If a greater foundation were laid, then it would have the pricier structure placed upon it. The key was to live up to the foundation. In the end the sure way to know if the structure was sound would be during a time a trouble like an earthquake or a terrible storm. Long after the builder received his reward paycheck, the true strength of the structure could be weakened and even fall.

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In Matthew 16:16, Peter made foundational reference, *“You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.”* Jesus’ response was *Matthew 16:18-19 “upon this rock I will build My church; and the gates of Hades will not overpower it.”* Simply put, Jesus is the foundation of the church and the church is the structure. Hence, when the church comes to the realization Jesus is the foundation for which the church is built, then we, as the bricks in the structure, are unified.

### #3: Realize that we are the temple of God.

1 Corinthians 3:16-17, Do you not know that you are a temple of God and *that* the Spirit of God dwells in you? <sup>17</sup> 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.

That’s right, the body is the temple of God and the Holy Spirit. This is mentioned more than once in the scriptures. For example, *1 Cor 6:19-20, Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and that you are not your own?* <sup>20</sup> *For you have been bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body.* And again, *Ephesians 2:20-21, “having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the corner stone,* <sup>21</sup> *in whom the whole building, being fitted together, is growing into a holy temple in the Lord”*

When we actually take the time to see the uniqueness of that statement, the end result is unification in the church. We will be too busy living for Jesus instead of comparing ourselves to one another in divisiveness.

### #4: Realize that we are not know-it-alls.

1 Corinthians 3:18-23 Let no man deceive himself. If any man among you thinks that he is wise in this age, he must become foolish, so that he may become wise. <sup>19</sup> For the wisdom of this world is foolishness before God. For it is written, *“He is THE ONE WHO CATCHES THE WISE IN THEIR CRAFTINESS”;* <sup>20</sup> and again, *“THE LORD KNOWS THE REASONINGS of the wise, THAT THEY ARE USELESS.”* <sup>21</sup> So then let no one boast in men. For all things belong to you, <sup>22</sup> whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas or the world or life or death or things present or things to come; all things belong to you, <sup>23</sup> and you belong to Christ; and Christ belongs to God.

One of the biggest causes of division is when there are a group of know-it-alls among the church members. When people are exalting themselves, it is because they are self-perceived are “smarter and wiser” than a fellow saint, resulting in chaos. Take the route of humility by being a “not know-it-all”. 1 Cor 8:2 *“If anyone supposes that he knows anything, he has not yet known as he ought to know”* If we realize the importance of this, then we will eliminate division.

### In Conclusion:

We are to always strive to keep division out of the church, but it is through holding to four self-realizations for which this can be done. We must realize that 1. We are fellow workers in God’s field, 2. We share a common foundation of Jesus, 3. We are the temple of God, and 4. We don’t are not know-it-alls. We can share the realization of true Christian unity if we share the self-realizations discussed by Paul.