

Unit III: Christians and Sacrifice

Construction Zone

DEVOTIONAL READING: 2 Corinthians 6:14-18
BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE: 1 Corinthians 3:1-23
PRINT PASSAGE: 1 Corinthians 3:10-23

KEY VERSE

Other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ.
(1 Corinthians 3:11, KJV)

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No one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ. (1 Corinthians 3:11, NIV)

Lesson Aims

As a result of experiencing this lesson, you should be able to do the following:

- **Assess the factors faced by the Corinthian church community that caused Paul to write the message of 1 Corinthians 2 and 3.**
- **Value the foundation and building materials that make for a solid and united church community.**
- **Identify how God's holy temple shows in and through believers.**

*Key Terms

Foundation (verse 12)—Greek: *themelios* (them-el'-ee-os): belonging to the foundation; of or for a foundation; groundwork; a foundation stone.

Grace (verse 10)—Greek: *charis* (khar'-ece): a gift or blessing brought to humankind by Jesus Christ; kindness; favor.

Manifest (verse 13)—Greek: *phaneros* (fan-er-os'): visible; apparent; clear; evident; "shown" (NIV).

Reward (verse 14)—Greek: *misthos* (mis-thos'): pay; wages; salary; recompense.

Saved (verse 15)—Greek: *sózó* (sode'-zo): healed; preserved; rescued; ensured salvation; restored.

Wise (verse 10)—Greek: *sophos* (sof-os'): skilled; learned; cultivated; clever; astute; sage.

***(Word Study Supplement—Refer to page 2)**



The Biblical Context

Paul organized the church at Corinth during his second missionary journey after ministering in Macedonian/Greek cities in approximately AD 49–52. Paul ministered in Corinth for one and a half years before departing for Ephesus and Palestine. Corinth was noted for its moral corruption and religious plurality. Consequently, the church there was plagued with multiple problems, the most serious being their inability to separate themselves from the ungodliness around them. After receiving a disturbing report from Chloe's household about schisms, conflicts within the church, and moral issues, Paul wrote what is known as 1 Corinthians. This letter's content also addressed answers to questions posed by the church regarding other concerns—marriage, food sacrificed to idols, issues about spiritual gifts, and the believer's resurrection. The immediate context of the Print Passage—1 Corinthians 3:10-23—revolves around divisions in the church over leaders, specifically Paul and Apollos, which Paul describes as carnal, unspiritual behavior for Christians. Paul used three metaphors to emphasize the error in elevating leaders over one another because each is a servant God used to help them come to faith in Jesus Christ. In the first metaphor, 1 Corinthians 3:8-9, Paul compares himself and Apollos to field workers in which one plants the seed, while the other waters in another owner's (God's) field. In the second metaphor (verses 10-15), Paul pictures himself as a master builder who laid the foundation of faith in Christ, who is the building's foundation. Paul emphasizes that builders must build carefully because the quality of their work is subject to severe judgment by God. In verses 16-23, Paul's third metaphor, he emphasizes God's superior wisdom and the need to focus on Christ as the object of spiritual allegiance instead of aligning with and being divided over human leaders (whose wisdom is limited).

Introduction

The word *foundation* refers to an underlying base or support, the body or ground upon which something is built up or overlayed. A more concise definition is “the basis or groundwork of anything.” Thus, a solid foundation is essential. For example, the need for shelter and multiple social interactions requires buildings, houses, and other physical structures. These physical structures all begin with a foundation—the most significant part of the construction process. The foundation supports a home or building and bears the weight because the structure will not stand without a solid base underneath. Architects, builders, and engineers agree that regarding the significance of a building's foundation, a foundation must be done right first because errors that occur during construction cannot be easily corrected. Subject-matter disciplines—music, art, mathematics, literature, the sciences, and athletics—also require a solid foundation for successful mastery. More importantly, for the Christian life, our faith must be built on a solid foundation if it is to mature and allow us to persevere, be effective disciples, and produce the fruits of righteousness. This foundation is none other than Jesus Christ.

This is why Jude, writing to encourage his readers in the faith, instructed them to build themselves up on their faith (whose object is Jesus), pray in the Holy Spirit, keep themselves in God's love, and expect Christ's mercy to bring them to eternal life (see Jude 20-21). Jude used the Greek word *epoikodomeo* in verse 20, which means “build up or to build upon,” encouraging these believers to build upon a solid, existing foundation. In 1 Corinthians 3, Paul teaches this same principle, using the aforementioned word four times in as many verses and identifies the existing foundation

as Jesus Christ. Thus, if we desire to build strong Christian lives, we must ensure that our faith and hope are built on nothing less than the finished work of Jesus Christ.

ANALYSIS OF THE BIBLICAL TEXT

Build on the Right Foundation (*1 Corinthians 3:10-17*)

KJV

10 According to the grace of God which is given unto me, as a wise masterbuilder, I have laid the foundation, and another buildeth thereon. But let every man take heed how he buildeth thereupon.

11 For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ.

12 Now if any man build upon this foundation gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, stubble;

13 Every man's work shall be made manifest: for the day shall declare it, because it shall be revealed by fire; and the fire shall try every man's work of what sort it is.

14 If any man's work abide which he hath built thereupon, he shall receive a reward.

15 If any man's work shall be burned, he shall suffer loss: but he himself shall be saved; yet so as by fire.

16 Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you?

17 If any man defile the temple of God, him shall God destroy; for the temple of God is holy, which temple ye are.

NIV

10 By the grace God has given me, I laid a foundation as a wise builder, and someone else is building on it. But each one should build with care.

11 For no one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ.

12 If anyone builds on this foundation using gold, silver, costly stones, wood, hay or straw,

13 their 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 person's work.

14 If what has been built survives, the builder will receive a reward.

15 If it is burned up, the builder will suffer loss but yet will be saved—even though only as one escaping through the flames.

16 Don't you know that you yourselves are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in your midst?

17 If anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy that person; for God's temple is sacred, and you together are that temple.

Among the issues plaguing the church in Corinth was the undue prominence given to preachers and leaders, particularly those responsible for leading them to Christ

and mentoring them in the Word. This misguided tendency caused division among the congregation. Paul addresses this issue in chapters 3 and 4 of his first letter to the Corinthians. In chapter 3, Paul uses metaphors to illustrate the damaging error of elevating and crediting leaders as the source of salvation instead of God. Paul completes the metaphor of the church as an agricultural field in verse 9, describing himself and Apollos as laborers among the Corinthians who belong to God. Their allegiance should be to God, not human leaders. Paul then shifts to the metaphor of constructing a building in **verse 10**, describing himself as a master builder by God's grace. God used Paul to lay the foundation for the church in Corinth by introducing them to Christ. Others are now building on this foundation. Paul's purpose is to show that all human teachers are co-workers, not competitors, and it is senseless to choose sides and judge their work because God produces the results of their labor.

Leaders and teachers must be careful how they build through their teaching and leading because Jesus Christ is the foundation (**verse 11**). No human leader can lay another foundation because the only one that will stand is the message of salvation that begins and ends with Jesus Christ. Every builder must use quality materials that last instead of inferior ones that cannot withstand time and endure God's judgment (**verses 12-13**). Paul emphasizes that it is the quality of the works of those serving the church, not the person, and only quality work will survive Christ's testing and receive a reward (**verse 14**). Those whose work fails Christ's evaluation will receive some unspecified loss (**verse 15**). However, this loss does not refer to salvation because those in Christ are eternally secure. In **verses 16-17**, Paul personalizes his instructions by reminding the Corinthians that they are God's temple collectively and individually because the Holy Spirit indwells them. Therefore, they must guard against defiling God's holiness residing within them; otherwise, they will face God's harsh and painful judgment. Paul may refer to anyone attempting to destroy the church with erroneous teaching or causing division among God's people. In summary, Paul cautions against giving undue prominence to church leaders, reminding the Corinthians that their allegiance should be to God. The Corinthians were reminded that they were God's temple and must guard against defiling it with false teachings or divisions, lest they face God's judgment.

WHAT DO YOU THINK?

How can the faith community ensure that its Christ-centered teaching ministries promote Christian unity?

Align with True Wisdom (1 Corinthians 3:18-23)

KJV

18 Let no man deceive himself. If any man among you seemeth to be wise in this world, let him become a fool, that he may be wise.

19 For the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God. For it is written, He taketh the wise in their own craftiness.

20 And again, The Lord knoweth the thoughts of the wise, that they are vain.
21 Therefore let no man glory in men. For all things are your's;
22 Whether Paul, or Apollos, or Cephas, or the world, or life, or death, or things present,
or things to come; all are your's;
23 And ye are Christ's; and Christ is God's.

NIV

18 Do not deceive yourselves. If any of you think you are wise by the standards of this age, you should become “fools” so that you may become wise.
19 For the wisdom of this world is foolishness in God's sight. As it is written: “He catches the wise in their craftiness”;
20 and again, “The Lord knows that the thoughts of the wise are futile.”
21 So then, no more boasting about human leaders! All things are yours,
22 whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas or the world or life or death or the present or the future—all are yours,
23 and you are of Christ, and Christ is of God.

As a guard against succumbing to humanized teaching (wood, hay, stubble) and to eliminate division over leaders and teachers, Paul summarizes his teaching on wisdom and foolishness begun earlier in this letter. He warns those deceiving themselves into thinking they are wise regarding contemporary human wisdom. He declares that anyone who does should become foolish to receive God's wisdom, be truly wise, and recognize that human wisdom is foolishness without God (**verses 18-19a**). Consequently, in this context, unity in the church will never become a reality unless human wisdom is recognized as what God declares foolishness, nor until believers become foolish in the world's eyes by conforming to God's wisdom in matters of salvation and spirituality. Those wise in the world's knowledge cannot comprehend spiritual things because, to them, it appears to be foolishness, thus leading to the rejection of spiritual truth. Hence, Paul concludes that God knows that the thoughts of those wise in human wisdom are useless, leading them farther away from spiritual truth (**verses 19b-20**).

Further, Paul explains that division among Christians can be eliminated when they refuse to align themselves with and boast about specific spiritual leaders and teachers by selfishly seeing themselves as wise in their eyes by selecting the leader they claim as better (**verse 21**). The Corinthians received excellent teaching from Paul, Apollos, and Peter; therefore, they had no reason to cut themselves off from these God-given gifts for pride's sake. Instead, they should receive these leaders' unique ministries rather than claiming to belong to one over the other—because all things that come with their inheritance in Christ belong to and unify them just as Christ, God, and the Holy Spirit are One (**verses 22-23**). The presence of division within the church challenges believers to practice Paul's instructions to the Corinthians regarding how to eliminate it. First, an atmosphere must be created where God's Word is the only standard prioritized, and human opinions are not allowed to substitute or replace divine

revelation. Second, Christians must allow the indwelling Holy Spirit to give them discernment and spiritual insight to avoid aligning themselves with leaders and teachers because of their charismatic personalities, personal appeal, intellectual abilities, and preaching and teaching styles.

WHAT DO YOU THINK?

How is godly wisdom acquired, and how can it become the standard for Christian living and a deterrent to division within the faith community?

A Closing Thought

Paul addresses the problem of division within the Corinthian Christians' fellowship caused by some among them aligning themselves with one leader over another instead of God, the source of their salvation. Paul's solution involved adhering to some practical spiritual principles the faith community can apply. Using metaphors for the church, Paul taught that (1) God graciously and uniquely uses all leaders and teachers to build on the church's foundation, Jesus Christ; (2) they must carefully and faithfully build on it given their works being tested by God's judgment; and (3) their rewards will be based on the value of the works. Additionally, Paul reminded the Corinthians that they were God's temple and should maintain its purity and sanctity because of God's promise to judge severely those who don't. Finally, Paul concluded that division over leaders can be eliminated by seeking God's wisdom, not the world's, and acknowledging that God has given them all things for their good.

Your Life

Paul's instructions to the Corinthians Christians—regarding the damaging effect that making leaders “celebrities” has on a church congregation—challenge us to recognize that God gives them to the church to assist believers' spiritual growth with their unique spiritual gifts. Thus, your tasks become prioritizing the faith community above individuals, acknowledging Christ as its only foundation, and focusing on maintaining its unity and sanctity as God's temple indwelt by the Holy Spirit.

Your World!

The division that developed around Paul, Apollos, and Peter among the Corinthians was based on their attraction to their individual styles, personalities, and personal appeal to various congregation members. Some have experienced division in their congregation in reality or vicariously for similar reasons today. However, the preventative solution is to listen to and respect spiritual leaders and teachers based on their faithfulness to the Word, not their personalities and abilities. Therefore, it becomes believers' responsibility to pray for spiritual insight and discernment to recognize those whom God calls, equips, and sends to His people to lead and teach for His glory and their benefit.

Closing Prayer

Gracious God, please grant us the spiritual insight to acknowledge Christ as the church's foundation, commit our allegiance to Him, and prioritize the church above individual personalities while respecting those who labor tirelessly and faithfully in Your Word. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Conclusion

(Preparing for Next Week's Lesson)

Next week's lesson explores Paul's guidance regarding how believers glorify or dishonor God with their bodies. Read 1 Corinthians 6:12-20.

Home Daily Bible Readings

MONDAY, August 4	"God Created Man and Woman"	(Genesis 2:4-7, 18-25)
TUESDAY, August 5	"Life Is Short; Live Wisely"	(Psalm 90:1-12)
WEDNESDAY, August 6	"Live Gloriously"	(1 Corinthians 10:23-33)
THURSDAY, August 7	"Receive God's Gifts with Thanksgiving"	(1 Timothy 4:1-5)
FRIDAY, August 8	"No Hiding Place from God"	(Psalm 139:1-12)
SATURDAY, August 9	"Fearfully and Wonderfully Made"	(Psalm 139:13-24)
SUNDAY, August 10	"A Temple of the Holy Spirit"	(1 Corinthians 6:12-20)

NOTES
