

## Series on First Corinthians

By Doug Hamilton

### Chapter 3: The Strong Church

In Acts 18 we find the apostle Paul arriving at Corinth for the first time.

- He met Priscilla and Aquila as they were already kicked out of Rome 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 was finally turned up 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: You see nothing of Apollos mentioned in the work of the Corinthian church. The church at Corinth at already been well established with a firm foundation for nearly three years. It is now time to discuss the man named Apollos.

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 that a disciple named Apollos was discovered by Priscilla and Aquila. Verses 24-25 state that 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, obviously demonstrating this high 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.
  - 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.

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- Was not properly taught concerning baptism, for he had only known of the obsolete baptism of John the baptist.
- Priscilla and Aquila saw the great potential in him as a messenger of the gospel and sought to talk with him privately. 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 identifies an identical situation, we must assume that Apollos was baptized after being shown a way of God more accurately (26).
- Notice that after a lengthy discussion with Priscilla and Aquila, the former missionaries to Corinth, Apollos desired to go to a place where his skill set would be best used. It seems that he could also see his potential in assisting in the young church in Corinth by publically shutting 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 that Paul had laid. Now Apollos was at Corinth, taking over the duties to establish a stronger and more complete church, building a spiritual structure upon a sure foundation. It is with that in mind that I wish to begin out text for today.

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?

- As previously discussed in chapters 1 and 2, the Corinthians had become divisive in their approach to each other. This was a culture that had always elevated great *sophists* ("eloquent and wise" speakers) that would come and demonstrate their "superior" speaking and debate skills. If you could wax eloquent about any topic in Corinth, YOU WERE SOMEBODY!
- Sometime after Apollos had taken the lead in the continuance of spiritual growth for the Corinthians, they began to see him as a more eloquent speaker than the apostle Paul. Many of them actually 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."*
- It appears at sometime they were also exposed to the Apostle Peter, for they were lumping him into the rating system, stating in so in 1:12. This would have to be dealt with immediately in Paul's correspondence.
- The Corinthian church was really a divided, dysfunctional group. Within the remainder of the chapter are four thoughts that eliminate division from within a congregation.

### Dealing with Division in the Church

#1: Realize we are fellow-workers together 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,

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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. It was this agricultural produce that was distributed to the many residents of the area. Without citizens planting seed and watering the fields there would be no crop. Planting seed with no water or watering with no seed would yield nothing at all. They understood it just like we would today.
- There were two primary people that aided in the growth of the Corinthian church, Paul and Apollos. Paul brought the gospel there for the first time and Apollos went back to aid in personal growth. Paul planted, Apollos water, but it was God that caused the growth in the end. They did not even own the field, but God was the owner and He caused the increase in the end.
- 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 we must build the church according to the foundation.

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) and is translated as an "architect". Today they are the professionals that draw up the plans for a structure. In the first century they were the ones that laid the foundation of the structure.
- In ancient Corinth there were many of the great structures. It is not uncommon for the foundations of these structures to still be in place today more than 2000 years later.
- Once that foundation was firmly placed, then regular builder would begin his structure for which it was built. 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 the structure quality. 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 (i.e. a paycheck) the true strength of the structure could be weakened and even fall.

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- In Matthew 16:16 Peter makes the proclamation *Simon Peter answered, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God."* This was the statement to which Jesus said in response *Matthew 16:18-19 "upon this rock I will build My church; and the gates of Hades will not overpower it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven"* This is the foundation for the Christian, the entrustment of a soul making an appeal to the answer of a good conscience toward God (1 Pet 3:21-22).
- We must build accordingly to the actual foundation that was laid. When we set this as our goal, then division in the church is placed on life support.

### #3: Realize that we personally are a 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.
  - 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.
  - 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 less division 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 you factor in the "know-it-all" syndrome. When people are exalting themselves because they think they are smarter and wiser than his comrades of the kingdom, it results 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.