

## WHICH FOUNDATION?

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<sup>1</sup>CO 3:1 Brothers, I could not address you as spiritual but as worldly—mere infants in Christ. <sup>2</sup> I gave you milk, not solid food, for you were not yet ready for it. Indeed, you are still not ready. <sup>3</sup> You are still worldly. For since there is jealousy and quarreling among you, are you not worldly? Are you not acting like mere men? <sup>4</sup> For when one says, “I follow Paul,” and another, “I follow Apollos,” are you not mere men?

<sup>1</sup>CO 3:5 What, 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. <sup>6</sup> I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God made it grow. <sup>7</sup> So neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God, who makes things grow. <sup>8</sup> The man who plants and the man who waters have one purpose, and each will be rewarded according to his own labor. <sup>9</sup> For we are God’s fellow workers; you are God’s field, God’s building.

<sup>1</sup>CO 3:10 By 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. <sup>11</sup> For no one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ. <sup>12</sup> If any man builds on this foundation using gold, silver, costly stones, wood, hay or straw, <sup>13</sup> his 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. <sup>14</sup> If what he has built survives, he will receive his reward. <sup>15</sup> If it is burned up, he will suffer loss; he himself will be saved, but only as one escaping through the flames.

<sup>1</sup>CO 3:16 Don’t you know that you yourselves are God’s temple and that God’s Spirit lives in you? <sup>17</sup> If anyone destroys God’s temple, God will destroy him; for God’s temple is sacred, and you are that temple.

<sup>1</sup>CO 3:18 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. <sup>19</sup> For the wisdom of this world is foolishness in God’s sight. As it is written: “He catches the wise in their craftiness;” <sup>20</sup> and again, “The Lord knows that the thoughts of the wise are futile.” <sup>21</sup> So then, no more boasting about men! 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 of Christ, and Christ is of God.

Paul never had a church that bothered him so much as did the Corinthian Church. The Corinthian Church was full of problems and Paul wrote two letters to this troubled congregation, perhaps three, trying to get them to ‘grow up’, to become mature Christians, to quit being ‘babes in Christ.’ Whether or not Paul succeeded in straightening out these ‘carnal’ Christians we will never know. But his ‘spirit-filled-words’ have certainly given strength and courage to Christian believers ever since; and those who have heeded Paul’s words have been sanctified by the Word and by the Holy Spirit.

But these Corinthians were quite different than Christians born of the Spirit and living in the Spirit, whom Paul called pneumatikos men (and women). They were sarkinos Christians, fleshly Christians, who lived and behaved like the unsaved. However, they were saved and they had formed different parties and these parties were built around different preachers, Paul, Apollos, and Simon Peter. The Zondervan Reference Bible states it like this: “As in 2:1, Paul calls the Corinthians “brothers” before reprimanding them for their spiritual immaturity. Not only had he not preached to them with persuasive words (2:1-5), but here he states he could not even speak to them as to those with spiritual maturity. They were acting immaturely as those motivated by the world’s thoughts and actions.” So then, the Corinthian believers were Christian believers, but, according to Paul, they were not building their lives upon the foundation of Jesus Christ.

If we look closely in the Word we can see four distinct foundations that Paul speaks about in chapter three.

**I. THE FIRST FOUNDATION IS THE FOUNDATION OF HUMAN PERSONALITY.** The Corinthian Christians were basically organized into 4 distinct groups. There were those who clung to the eloquence of Apollos. Do you remember Luke mentioning him? <sup>AC 18:24</sup> “Meanwhile a Jew named Apollos, a native of Alexandria, came to Ephesus. He was a learned man, with a thorough knowledge of the Scriptures. <sup>25</sup> He had been instructed in the way of the Lord, and he spoke with great fervor and taught about Jesus accurately, though he knew only the baptism of John.”

Then we find that after Apollos had been told about Jesus he became an ardent disciple of Jesus. <sup>AC 18:27</sup> “When Apollos wanted to go to Achaia, the brothers encouraged him and wrote to the disciples there to welcome him. On arriving, he was a great help to those who by grace had believed. <sup>28</sup> For he vigorously refuted the Jews in public debate, proving from the Scriptures that Jesus was the Christ.”

The Apollos party were absolutely swayed by the learning and the eloquence of this noble preacher.

Then there was the Simon Peter party. Since they had heard of all the exploits of the Big Fisherman, and since they knew the power he held in the church as its first pastor in Jerusalem, they would put him before anyone else.

Then there was the Paul party. They knew that this little Jew that has been described as ‘a short little man with a hooked nose who, when he preached, glowed with the Holy Spirit’ was indeed the person they wanted to follow.

Then there was the Jesus party who were so self righteous that they thought they were better than anyone in the other three parties.

What were they doing, however? These immature believers in Corinth were putting the messenger above the Messiah, the preacher above the Prince of Peace, the

human being above That Divine Being, man above the God-man, personality above the Person of Christ. Therefore they were building on the wrong foundation. They were building upon the foundation of human personality.

Let us be careful, however, for we may be doing the same thing. The social sciences talk a lot about personality. In psychology personality and self are thoroughly discussed. My granddaughter who is a freshman in high school was telling my wife about being permitted to take advanced courses. She was quite excited and said, "I'm even going to take psychology." Why do we act like children when some so-called 'famous' person comes to our town or community? Why do we behave differently when someone present is either very rich or very powerful? In sociology this is called the BIRG Effect, and means Basking In Reflected Glory. Somehow, in the presence of famous personalities, we too tend to build a few blocks upon the altar, or should I say, upon the personality of that individual. To be with a powerful person makes us feel a little power too. Christians should not build their lives upon the foundation of other people, but only upon the foundation of Jesus Christ and start Bathing In His Reflected Glory.

II. PAUL MENTIONS A SECOND FOUNDATION UPON WHICH THE CORINTHIAN BELIEVERS WERE BUILDING, THE FOUNDATION OF HUMAN THINGS. <sup>3:12</sup> "If any man builds on this foundation using gold, silver, costly stones, wood, hay or straw, <sup>13</sup> his 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. <sup>14</sup> If what he has built survives, he will receive his reward. <sup>15</sup> If it is burned up, he will suffer loss; he himself will be saved, but only as one escaping through the flames."

Apparently the Corinthians believers were as materialistic as many Christian believers are today. Paul lays out several things men build upon. He starts with gold, silver, and costly stones. These are things the rich enjoy. They enjoy flashing their status symbols at the poor, and those less fortunate. There were in the church at Corinth the rich believers. The 'haves' and the 'have nots' ate the Lord's Supper, but they treated it differently. In chapter 11, Paul mentions this and says, <sup>18</sup> "In the first place, I hear that when you come together as a church, there are divisions among you, and to some extent I believe it. <sup>19</sup> No doubt there have to be differences among you to show which of you have God's approval. <sup>20</sup> When you come together, it is not the Lord's Supper you eat, <sup>21</sup> for as you eat, each of you goes ahead without waiting for anybody else. One remains hungry, another gets drunk. <sup>22</sup> Don't you have homes to eat and drink in? Or do you despise the church of God and humiliate those who have nothing? What shall I say to you? Shall I praise you for this? Certainly not!"

Further we could symbolize those of the working class, or middle class, who use wood for crafts or for lumber. Many of us would fall into the middle class or the working class. We too can build upon the wrong foundation. The Word of God condemns just as strongly those who put their faith in inferior materials as those who put their faith in their riches. Again, the word straw and hay probably refers to those who labored in farming, and these inferior materials could be construed as the poor. Most of the parables of Jesus spoke about covetousness and about material gain at the expense of our eternal souls.

The poor without Jesus are included here and are doubly poor because they have little or nothing to look forward to in this life and nothing to look forward to when they die. I'd rather be as poor as the proverbial church mouse and have Jesus, than to be as rich as the richest man in the world and not know Jesus.

In essence then, Paul is proclaiming that men build their lives upon materialism, and that the Christians in Corinth who do that will see it all go up in smoke. They will have nothing in eternity, no reward whatever, but they will be saved by 'the skin of their teeth.' The Christian is not working to enter Heaven; he will enter heaven when he dies. The wise believer is not working for salvation, which he already has, but for God's glory and for whatever reward God has for him.

Think about that for a moment. You live your life selfishly and gain what you can in order to live 'the good life.' But you become so materialistic that you forget to "Seek first the Kingdom of God" and you die as all humans must. What will you do when you get there and see that everything you lived for was vain? Solomon knew the deceitfulness of riches, that it was all vanity and vexation of spirit. I've told the story of a very wealthy lady who had a poor servant who depended upon the little that the rich lady paid her to live and maintain family. The poor lady's health finally got bad and she died and went to heaven. In time the rich lady also died, as all humans must. When she got to heaven she saw the wonderful mansion that the poor lady had, and thought that hers would be the grandest of all. But when given her mansion, a very small little place, she said to St. Peter, "But I was wealthy and lived in a huge mansion, and my housemaid now lives in a beautiful mansion, much larger and much more luxurious than mine. Why don't I have a beautiful mansion too?" St. Peter answered her with these words, "Lady, I'm sorry, but we build each mansion out of the materials that those who come here send to us beforehand."

Don't build upon the foundation of human things; build your foundation upon Christ. "Seek first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness and all these things shall be added unto you."

III. THE THIRD FOUNDATION PAUL MENTIONS IN OUR SCRIPTURE IS THE FOUNDATION OF THE HUMAN MIND. Paul had, perhaps, the most brilliant mind of his time. His letters and Luke's biographical statements about Paul show us that he was a brilliant Jewish Rabbi who became converted to Christ as He appeared to him on the Damascus Road. His brilliance allowed Paul to forge most of the Christian doctrine that we have in the New Testament. He knew well the philosophy of Stoicism, the belief that things were fated to happen and that human beings should accept such things with calmness and fortitude. Tarsus, the city of Paul's birth and childhood, and early ministry, was the capital of Stoicism in the ancient world. Moreover he is continually fighting the heresy of the Judaizers, and the doctrine of the Gnostics. The Gnostics, from the word mind or gnosis, believed that salvation came by knowledge. The Gnostics believed they were the "people who knew," superior people, and that the intuitive knowledge they had received gave them salvation. They were smarter and better than anyone else, they believed.

Just like today, there were many in Paul's day who believed they had all the wisdom they needed. Some such believers were members of the Corinthian Church. Paul alludes to them in this way: <sup>CO 3:18</sup> "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. <sup>19</sup> For the wisdom of this world is foolishness in God's sight. As it is written: "He catches the wise in their craftiness;" <sup>20</sup> and again, "The Lord knows that the thoughts of the wise are futile." <sup>21</sup> So then, no more boasting about men! 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 of Christ, and Christ is of God."

God has given us human beings the wonderful gift of the mind. In fact, according to the Old Testament Shema and the words of Jesus, we are to Love God with all our hearts, minds, souls and strength. The mind is exalted by Scripture when it is in the service of God, in whatever direction that service takes one. But one must add that the mind can be just as deceitful as the heart, which is said to be deceitful above all things. The human mind has been formed by the objects we have named and have learned to manipulate, in a word, by human language. But the point is this—God has given us both the gift of the mind and the gift of the objects that we have named in order to manipulate them and to communicate 'truth' across time. Anyone who claims to know by the mind is making a very boastful statement. By whose mind? By which mind? By which system? The Bible says that 'we believe with our hearts' not our minds. Moreover the Bible says "The fool has said in his heart, there is no God."

I was interested to hear that Professor Hawkins of Great Britain, purported to be the most intelligent man alive, stated recently that 'God is not any longer necessary in explaining the universe, so long as there is the law of gravity.' One must needs ask the learned professor, "Who gave us the law of gravity?" Is the law of gravity a god unto itself? Is the law of gravity greater than the mind of man? If so, Professor Hawkins, you have a god named gravity that you can worship; but I will worship my Heavenly Father who gave us all the laws of the universe and all the other universes as well. I could more safely say that Professor Hawkins is no longer necessary in explaining the universe.

Some of the immature Christians in Corinth were building upon the foundation of the human mind; some Christians today so exalt knowledge (their particular field of knowledge) that they look silly, act silly, write silly, and talk silly. Surely the mind cannot be left out of the discussion, but while the human mind lifts us up somewhat above the other animals, it does not, cannot, will not, lift us up to God! That man who thinks he knows more than God the Father is simply accepting the lie in the Garden as his ultimate truth. We should not build our lives upon the foundation of the human mind.

**IV. WE HAVE A BETTER FOUNDATION TO BUILD OUR LIVES UPON THAN HUMAN PERSONALITY, OR, HUMAN THINGS, OR, THE HUMAN MIND. WE MUST BUILD UPON THE FOUNDATION OF JESUS CHRIST OUR LORD.**

<sup>1CO 3:18</sup> "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. <sup>19</sup> For the wisdom of

this world is foolishness in God's sight. As it is written: "He catches the wise in their craftiness;" <sup>20</sup> and again, "The Lord knows that the thoughts of the wise are futile." <sup>21</sup> So then, no more boasting about men! 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 of Christ, and Christ is of God."

The Corinthian believers did not think they were so bad, I am certain. Nor do we. Yet, by our works we demonstrate too often that our priorities are not God's priorities, that our ways are not God's ways. Paul said "Do not deceive yourselves." Yet we are constantly deceiving ourselves into believing that we can work things out for ourselves. While we doubt the atheist who says, there is no God, we live as if God does not exist. We pamper ourselves, buy our new homes and spend fortunes upon things that will rust and rot, and give very little to God's Kingdom and to the Church for which Jesus died, His body in this world. When, oh when, will the Church build upon the only foundation that cannot rust and rot? When will our blindness and our selfishness pass? When we die and leave it all behind, will the Master look into our eyes and say, "You built your life, which could have been fruitful and beautiful, upon the wrong foundation." Or will the Master say to you, "Welcome and well done good and faithful servant; you have built your life upon Me; enter into the Joys of the Lord."