

No Other Foundation, Part One

1 Corinthians 3:10 ESV According 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.**

- I. In his letter to the Corinthians, the Apostle Paul addresses many issues that are troubling that church. They range from an incestuous relationship that is being celebrated by the church, to the fact that some of the men of the church are visiting prostitutes, to drunkenness and gluttony corrupting their communion services, to rampant divorce and lawsuits among the body of believers in this church. (It kind of makes the challenges that City View faces seem mild by comparison, doesn't it!)
 - A. It will take Paul a full 16 chapters (as well as a follow-up letter) to sort out the mess that the Corinthians have made.
 1. I've thought long and hard about this, but if I had been Paul, after careful consideration, here's how my letter would have begun: "Dear Corinthians, what the heck is wrong with you?"
 2. But this is not how Paul begins. Look what he does:
 - B. Before he deals with incest, lawsuits, the affinity for prostitution, marriage and divorce, eating food offered to idols, the proper methods for the Lord's Supper, spiritual gifts or anything else in this church, he draws them back to the story of what Jesus has done by his death and resurrection, and the resulting power of that story.
 1. He does this first in the way he identifies them. He calls the people of the Corinthian Church (with all of their warts!), "those **sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints** together with all those who in every place call upon the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, both their Lord and ours" (1:2)
 - a) In doing this he affirms that, in spite of their many egregious flaws, their spirits have been cleansed by the sanctifying work of Jesus.
 - b) He also affirms that they are a part of the larger body of Christ that exists throughout the world.
 - c) He is doing this to focus their attention on Jesus and his accomplishment, and not on their weakness, immaturity and sin.
 2. He also does this by reminding them of **how** they became a part of Christ's body, the church. **1 Corinthians 1:4 ESV** I give thanks to my God always for you because of **the grace of God that was given you in Christ Jesus, 5 that in every way you were enriched in him** in all speech and all knowledge— **6 even as the testimony (story) about Christ was confirmed among you—**
 - a) They were made a part of His body, not by their choosing, or by the exercise of their righteousness (that is to say they just didn't just get their act together!). They didn't get in because any of them had a superior intellect or level of spirituality.

- b) They were made a part of the church because of “**the grace of God that was given (them) in Christ Jesus**” Paul says that the result of this was that their lives were enriched in every way.
- c) Paul makes it clear that they have nothing in which to boast with regard to their salvation later in chapter 1:
 - (1) **1 Corinthians 1:26 ESV** For consider your calling, brothers: not many of you were wise according to worldly standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth. **27** But **God chose** what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; **God chose** what is weak in the world to shame the strong; **28 God chose** what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are, **29** so that no human being might boast in the presence of God. **30** And **because of him you are in Christ Jesus**, who became **to us** wisdom from God, righteousness and sanctification and redemption, **31** so that, as it is written, “Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord.”
 - (2) So what an amazing set up for this letter! We have a church in which we will discover almost unheard of moral failure, and yet the Apostle begins his correction by affirming what the gospel is (present tense) doing in and among them.
- C. I know that there are some here who can’t really handle this. You assume that Paul is either overlooking the reality of their sin, or simply buttering them up before he brings the hammer down.
 - 1. Rest assured Paul is not intimidated when it comes to confronting their sin (and the resulting disgrace that it brings to the gospel.) Listen to what Paul says to those who would question his authority as an apostle a little later in the letter...
 - 2. **1 Corinthians 4:18 ESV** Some are arrogant, as though I were not coming to you. **19** But I will come to you soon, if the Lord wills, and I will find out not the talk of these arrogant people but their power. **20** For the kingdom of God does not consist in talk but in power. **21** What do you wish? **Shall I come to you with a rod**, or with love in a spirit of gentleness?
 - 3. If he’s willing to bring “the rod”, why does he affirm God’s grace and love instead of God’s anger and judgement?
- D. What Paul is doing by starting this letter with reminders of the gospel, is bringing the Corinthians back to the basis of all true saving faith. It is critical for us to remember that salvation **never** starts with you, your need, your spiritual hunger, your desire for God, your badness or your goodness.
 - 1. Salvation always only starts with Jesus, and what he accomplished. And (this may come as a shock!) what he accomplished was not primarily for or about you, but for the glory of the Father! I realize that this message is revolutionary in a culture that has been fed a steady diet of, “When He was on the cross, I was on his mind.”
 - a) Am I saying that the Father and the Son didn’t love you? No. God **is** love! Am I saying that Jesus’ death didn’t result in the unfathomable benefit of

freeing from the debt of sin and the burden of guilt and shame?
Absolutely not!

- b) **John 8:36 ESV** So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed.
- 2. What I am saying is that sin is not to be viewed primarily as a threat to you and your peace, your health and your wealth (of course it is that!); but in reality, it is ultimately an affront to the glory of a perfectly holy God.
 - a) Sin is the ultimate pollutant in the universe, coursing through all of creation on an epidemic scale, manifesting itself, not only by self-destructive depravity, but also rebellion against the majesty of the perfect God. .
 - b) God had created the universe and deemed everything he made to be “good”; but now because of sin, thorns co-exist with roses, lust is substituted for love, death is the guaranteed end of all life.
- 3. Therefore, the Son endured the cross, despising its shame, and is now seated at the right hand of God (as it says in Hebrews 12). And he did so because he was zealous for the glory of God.
- 4. God’s Passion for his own glory is confirmed over and over throughout scripture as the primary motivation for God’s rescue of his people.
 - a) **Psalms 106:7 ESV** Our fathers, when they were in Egypt, did not consider your wondrous works; they did not remember the abundance of your steadfast love, but rebelled by the sea, at the Red Sea. **8 Yet *he saved them for his name's sake***, that he might make known his mighty power.
 - b) **Isaiah 48:9 ESV** “***For my name's sake*** I defer my anger, ***for the sake of my praise*** I restrain it for you, that I may not cut you off. **10** Behold, I have refined you, but not as silver; I have tried you in the furnace of affliction. **11 *For my own sake, for my own sake***, I do it, for ***how should my name be profaned? My glory I will not give to another.***
 - (1) Pastor John Piper calls this passage “six hammer blows to a man-centered way of looking at the world”:
 - (2) For ***my*** name’s sake! For the sake of ***my*** praise! For ***my own*** sake! For ***my own*** sake! (Repeated passages are emphatic in Hebrew) How should ***my name*** be profaned? ***My glory*** I will not give to another!
- 5. The zeal for God’s glory was evident throughout Jesus’ life, and was the primary motivation for Jesus’ redemptive work.
 - a) **John 12:27 ESV** “Now is my soul troubled. And what shall I say? ‘Father, save me from this hour’? But ***for this purpose*** I have come to this hour. ***28a Father, glorify your name.***”
 - b) Notice that his ***ultimate purpose*** was not to save my backside, but to glorify the Name of the Father!
 - (1) But never let there be ***any*** doubt on this matter: I will praise him for all eternity because the glorious by-product of His dying and conquering sin and death in order to glorify the Father was, in fact, my rescue!
 - (2) Now we can stand in wonder and amazement that he has made us free from sin and guilt!

- (3) And this should result in even more glory to the Father in the form of our praise!
- II. So here we have the reason why Paul begins with what Jesus has done in his letter to the Corinthians, instead of addressing how they are flying off the rails.
- A. If you were to study the book of 1st Corinthians in its entirety, you would discover how over and over Paul makes the glory of God, and the beauty of the Gospel the main thing.
1. When he addresses their many sins, he addresses them as an indication that they, as recipients of amazing grace, have become disconnected from the truth of the gospel, and are living as less than Jesus died for them to be.
 - a) He doesn't focus on the goodness or badness of their given behaviors, but rather the way they are failing to bring glory to God, the very thing that Christ died, rose, and ascended to do.
 - b) For example, when he talks to them about their many sexual sins, even there, he makes the issue, not simple morality, but the glory of God.
 - c) **1 Corinthians 6:18 ESV** Flee from sexual immorality. Every other sin a person commits is outside the body, but the sexually immoral person sins against his own body. **19** Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God? You are not your own, **20** for you were bought with a price. So ***glorify God in your body.***
 2. Notice he doesn't say to these believers, "If you'd stop all of this sin and immorality, you could be the temple of the Holy Spirit, so knock it off!"
 - a) Instead he says, "Hold on guys! Don't you get it? The Holy Spirit, whom God has freely given you, has made your own body the temple where he chooses to dwell! He can do this, because you now belong to him. He bought you!"
 - b) "So because you don't belong to yourself anymore, and because you are the dwelling place of God's own spirit, ***glorify God with your body.***"
 - c) The issue for Paul is not sinning less, but glorifying God more!
- B. What is Paul doing here? Instead of bringing them to an acute awareness of all their sin and depravity, and what they should and should not be doing, he is drawing their attention back to what has been done for them, and that by Jesus!
1. Did they choose God? Were they the ones who orchestrated the transaction whereby they were purchased from sin, and death, and the devil? Did they make themselves the dwelling place of God's Spirit? No! No! No!
 - a) **2 Corinthians 5:18 ESV** ***All this is from God***, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation; **19** that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation.
 - b) The world wasn't reconciling itself to God, but "in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself".
 2. And because of this, Jesus, who is the hero of the story, the one whose costly sacrifice made it all possible, deserves all of the glory!

- a) **John 17:1 ESV** When Jesus had spoken these words, he lifted up his eyes to heaven, and said, “Father, the hour has come; **glorify your Son** that the Son may glorify you, **2** since you have given him authority over all flesh, to give eternal life to all whom you have given him. **3** And this is eternal life, that they know you the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent. **4** I glorified you on earth, having accomplished the work that you gave me to do. **5** And now, Father, **glorify me in your own presence with the glory that I had with you before the world existed.**
- b) When Paul reminds the Philippians of Christ’s obedience to God and sacrificial death in Philippians 2, he concludes by saying, “Therefore God has highly exalted him...”
- C. Jesus wasn’t the Father’s unwilling errand boy. By his obedience, he was purchasing a reward for himself! He was laying down a dowry for a bride! The church would be his body, but He would be the head!
- III. Everything we’ve talked about thus far becomes very important when you consider the very first thing in the long list that Paul must confront in the Corinthian church.
 - A. **1 Corinthians 1:10 ESV** I appeal to you, brothers, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree, and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be united in the same mind and the same judgment. **11** For it has been reported to me by Chloe's people that there is quarreling among you, my brothers. **12** What I mean is that each one of you says, “I follow Paul,” or “I follow Apollos,” or “I follow Cephas (Peter),” or “I follow Christ.”
 - B. Paul is confronting a sprouting celebrity culture that is causing division.
 - 1. People are choosing sides, saying, “I’m a Paul guy!”, or “Apollos has got a way with words!”, or “Peter was Jesus right-hand man, so he must have the inside track!”
 - 2. Some were even saying, “I’m a red-letter believer! I only listen to Jesus!” This sounded spiritual, but the problem with this thinking was that Christ had specifically given the Apostles the job of taking his message to the world after his ascension, and to do so with his full authority.
 - C. The result was a deeply-divided, factional church that instead of one body, one bride, and one community, was disintegrating into party loyalties.
 - D. Does this happen today? Yes it does! We identify ourselves, not as Paul identified the Corinthians, as those “called to be saints **together with all those who in every place call upon the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, both their Lord and ours**”, but as reformed, or charismatic, or gospel-centered, or seeker friendly, or Baptist, or Methodist, or Pentecostal, or Presbyterian.
 - 1. This state of affairs causes Paul to recoil in horror as he asks, **1 Corinthians 1:13a ESV** “Is Christ divided?”
 - 2. The church was envisioned by God as a **community** of believers. The word community is formed by the words “common” (as in what we have in common) and “unity”. What we have in common is our ransom by Jesus!
 - E. Don’t think that this is a simple appeal for us to get along and play nice. There will always be disagreements between sincere believers who won’t see eye to eye on a slew of issues.

- F. The problem is not honest disagreement, the problem starts when I identify myself more by my camp, or tribe than by our savior; more by the sign on the building than the blood of Jesus on my heart, the blood that purchased me.
- IV. And Paul throws a penalty flag because when factionalism infects the church in any form, it represents an attempt to steal the church from Christ and give it to some big shot or some big idea. Worse, we redirect the glory that Christ deserves and lay it at the feet of a man, or a pet doctrine.
- A. I am not saying that God has not called and established leaders. He certainly has. Nor am I saying that there is no such thing as true and false doctrine. Absolutely it matters what we believe! But do you want to know what true doctrine looks like? What God's leaders will teach?
1. **1 John 2:22 ESV** Who is the liar but **he who denies that Jesus is the Christ?** This is the antichrist, he **who denies the Father and the Son.**
 2. **1 John 3:23 ESV** And this is his commandment, **that we believe in the name of his Son Jesus Christ** and love one another, just as he has commanded us.
 3. **1 John 4:2 ESV** By this you know the Spirit of God: **every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, 3** and **every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God.** This is the spirit of the antichrist, which you heard was coming and now is in the world already.
 4. **1 John 5:1 ESV** **Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ has been born of God,** and everyone who loves the Father loves whoever has been born of him.
- B. Jesus is the only starting point for all true doctrine; that is, Jesus as he revealed himself in scripture and through the teaching of the Apostles. No matter how good it sounds, if you are not starting with Jesus, you're already on the wrong road. Come back to the beginning and correct your course.
- C. In our text today, Paul calls Jesus "the foundation". He says, "no one can lay a foundation other than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ."
1. The quality of a building is entirely dependent on the foundation. You spend millions on the interior design, but it is meaningless without a sound foundation.
 2. The same is true for a church. It can offer every program and have thousands attending every Sunday. It can build rock climbing walls and water slides. It can serve gourmet coffee hand-picked by Juan Valdez. It can have a best-selling 6'2" pastor with blond hair and perfect teeth...
 3. ...but if doesn't have Jesus, if it isn't built on the foundation of him alone, no matter how successful it looks now, it will not stand. I've lived long enough to see "the next big thing" become "yesterday's news" more times than I can count.
- D. Speaking about building on foundations, I'd like to develop this thought some more next week. I hope you will join us to explore this topic together...