

CORINTHIANS – THE MORE EXCELLENT WAY

STUDY 4

No other foundation

According to the grace of God which was given to me, as a wise master builder I laid a foundation, and another is building upon it. But let each man be careful how he builds upon it. For no man can lay a foundation other than the one which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. 1 CORINTHIANS 3:10,11

4a: Characteristics of Carnal Christians (3:1-4)

3:1,2 How are carnal, 'fleshly' Christians like babes? (1 Peter 2:1-3)

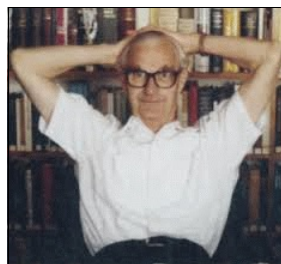
[v.1] Once again as Paul introduces a rebuke he softens it with the affectionate *brethren*. [Morris 62]

v.1 By **flesh** in this sense Paul does not mean the body, but fallen humanity with the sum-total of sinful propensities inherited by natural birth. [Bruce 42]

... *spiritual* and *fleshly* mark older and younger, mature and immature, brothers within the same family, not those who are within and those are outside a gnostic circle ... *fleshly men* are not those who habitually indulge in sensual sins, but those (cf. the *natural man* of ii.14) whose existence is determined not by God but by considerations internal to themselves, or internal at least to humanity as distinct from God. [Barrett 79,80]

3:3,4 In Paul's view, are the chief characteristics of 'carnality' those sins which most Christians consider to be 'fleshly'? (Gal.5:19-21)

[v.3] Paul reaches the root of the matter with his accusation that they are *yet carnal*. He has changed his word for *carnal* from the *sarkinos* of verse 1 to *sarkikos*. The *-inos* termination signifies 'made of ...'; thus in 2 Cor.iii.3 tablets 'made of stone', *lithinos*, are contrasted with those 'made of flesh', *sarkinos*. The *-ikos* ending rather means 'characterized by ...'; we see it in *psuchikos* of the 'natural' man and *pneumatikos* of the 'spiritual' man in ii.14f. The difference between *sarkinos* and *sarkikos* is like that between 'fleshy' and 'fleshly' ... The mature believer is *pneumatikos*, 'characterized by spirit'. To be characterized instead by flesh, as the Corinthians were, is the very opposite of what the Christian



Leon Morris

should be. 'Flesh', of course, as often in Paul, is used in an ethical and moral sense. It indicates the lower aspects of man's nature, as in Rom. xiii.14; Gal. v.13; Eph. ii.3, etc. [Morris 63]

4b: A Wrong View of Leaders (3:5-9,18-23)

3:5-9 Should we ever submit to ONE Christian leader? How should ministers of the gospel view each other? (Rom.12:10; Phil.2:3)

[v.8] The attention of the Corinthians should have been fastened on God, who alone effects all spiritual work, and not on His unimportant instruments ... there is an essential unity between planter and waterer. Obviously the work of neither can be successful without that of the other. So far from himself and Apollos being rivals, Paul maintains that they are *one*. [Morris 65]

3:18-23 Ignoring the fact that all things belong to us (v.22), how do many of us cheat ourselves?

[v.23] To elevate *men* in the way the Corinthians were doing is to make the biggest of all mistakes, that of elevating the creature ... So far from enriching themselves by staking their claim to exclusive rights in one teacher, the Corinthians were impoverishing themselves. They were cutting themselves off from the treasures that were really theirs. [Morris 72]

4c: Salvation and Rewards (3:10-17)

3:10-15 Should the security of the believer render he or she lazy or unfruitful?

[v.11] ... it is conceivable that some of the Peter party, depreciating Paul's apostolic claims, had told the Corinthians that it was to Peter that Jesus said 'you are Peter, and on this rock (*petra*) I will build my church' (Mt.16.18). Paul assures them that the only **foundation** that can be laid for the church is Christ himself, and that was the foundation which Paul had laid at Corinth with his preaching of 'Jesus Christ and him crucified'. The concept of Christ as the foundation -- natural in itself -- was strengthened in the early church by the use of Isa. 28.16 ('Behold, I am laying in Zion for a foundation a stone, a tested stone ...') frequently conflated with other 'stone' passages in OT, as a *testimonium* of Christ (cf. Rom. 9.33; 1 Pet. 2:6). [Bruce 44]

[v.14] The nature of the reward is not stated, but it is certainly not eternal salvation, which may be won by those whose work perishes (v.15). Something corresponding to the 'ten cities' and 'five cities' in the parable may be meant; opportunities of higher service. [Robertson/Plummer 64]

3:16-17 Note the heavy responsibility of those taking the lead -- the 'wise ones'!

[v.17] The seriousness of the divisions at Corinth is seen in the light of this

**The 'Rock',
the Christ
and Cephas**

character of the Church as God's temple ... To engage in divisions is to 'destroy' the divine society, and consequently to invite God to 'destroy' the sinner. [Morris 70]

The Idolatrous Impulse -- in the Church too!

Those forming these separate parties were gathering themselves around men and their views ... alone, any one of these men and the message he bore were incomplete ... the trouble in the Corinthian church was that that whole vision of the Divine purpose in building had been lost sight of by men who gathered round individuals. They had lost the vision of the whole, and were obsessed by that which was partial ... Think of the idea of building again. There are all kinds of workers in a building. There are carpenters and stone masons, plumbers and decorators. Suppose, in the course of the building, some people gathered round and said, We belong to the carpenters. We have no connection whatever with the stone masons. I need not go on with the supposition. We see the absurdity of the sect of the carpenters, or stone masons, plumbers, or detractors. In the work of building they work together, and all work with the ultimate building in mind. [Morgan 57,59]



**Mr & Mrs G.
Campbell Morgan
raised 4 sons who
became ministers**

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