

# **A Study of First Corinthians**

## **Week Three**

### **1 Corinthians 3:10-4:13**

#### **Day One**

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. 11 For no one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ. 12 If any man builds on this foundation using gold, silver, costly stones, wood, hay or straw, 13 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.

v. 10 – Paul knew that his purpose was to go to the Gentiles and lay a foundation for the gospel and church. This was usually a place where no one else had been:

It has always been my ambition to preach the gospel where Christ was not known, so that I would not be building on someone else's foundation (Romans 15:20).

**Not only did Paul know what he was supposed to do, he knew how best to do it. I wish every believer, and for that matter I wish I, was that focused. Do you know what you are supposed to do in your life? Do you know how you will best perform to get it done? For me, I love to travel and teach—that is what energizes me. So what energizes you?**

v. 11 – Paul was clear that Jesus was the one and only foundation, and that each workman could not change the foundation and be careful how they built on that foundation. Church work is exacting work. The Old Testament attention to detail was a shadow of what was to come. We are not free to build as we wish, but rather as the Spirit leads. We are not free to preach as we choose but as the Spirit and the Word constrain us.

vs. 12&13 – The temptation is to take this verse and apply it to all of life. The context, however, is the foundation of the Church and the work of building on that. From my experience does seem to prove that God will test all our work with fire. Therefore, we must build accurately and correctly, with the right materials.

**I have often said that these verses provide a picture of burnout. When the fire comes and your energy is gone, burned up through activities that weren't meant for you, what do you still have grace to do? Often that is an indication of what your purpose is. If you can draw or paint when you are burned out, then consider whether drawing isn't what you are supposed to do more often, if not all the time!**

The “Day” here does seem to point to any day when the ultimate reality and motive behind one's work is revealed for all to see.

## Day Two

14 If what he has built survives, he will receive his reward. 15 If it is burned up, he will suffer loss; he himself will be saved, but only as one escaping through the flames. 16 Don't you know that you yourselves are God's temple and that God's Spirit lives in you? 17 If anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy him; for God's temple is sacred, and you are that temple.

vs. 14&15 – I think of some of the televangelists of years gone by. Their work was tested, it did not survive and they suffered loss. Yet they themselves were saved. I just saw Jim Bakker on television and he is a much different man than when he headed the PTL empire. God saved and spared him, but his work was totally ruined. Of course, he was saved through public humiliation and time served in prison.

Jimmy Swaggart would be another example of one who is still walking with the Lord, but whose work suffered tremendous loss as it burned up on his “Day of the Lord.” God is no fool and promises to reward each person according to their obedience.

v. 16 – The “you” here is plural. We are each living stones built into a temple of God. What’s more, God’s Spirit lives in us, not just in each person. So there is a collective reality and presence of God that can only come about by people when they assemble together to worship and release the dynamic of the Spirit. There are some who have withdrawn from church attendance for various reasons. There is no doubt that they can worship God on their own, but that isn’t the only expression of worship that God commands. Plus, God created us so that a body dynamic would be released when we come together.

We can’t even pick and choose who we will be joined to in the Temple. That is God’s decision. Otherwise we would probably choose those who made us feel comfortable or with whom we had something in common. It’s God’s house and He builds it as He wishes. **Are you in a local church? If not, examine your reasons for why not. Are your reasons addressed by Scripture?**

v. 17 – God will deal with anyone who deals with His temple in a destructive manner. Keep in mind the context: Paul had urged them not to tamper with the foundation and to build wisely on the foundation of Jesus. It would seem to me that this is directed at those who would harm God’s church. I think not taking your place in God’s church is a destructive act, for it deprives God’s body of the gifts the Spirit assigned to you. **Do you agree or disagree? Why or why not?**

## Day Three

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. 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 men! 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.

v. 18 – It is not only possible for someone else to deceive us, it is possible for us to deceive ourselves! Help me, Lord! It seems that I can allow a bad attitude or bad thinking to prevail in my mind and that can lead to deception and wrong belief about God. How can I prevent this from happening?

Paul went on to say that I should become a fool so that I may become wise. Someone once said that I should humble myself otherwise God may humiliate me. Humility is a choice, not a feeling or spiritual gift. I should choose to humble myself. I should position myself that I know nothing so that God may be teach me something:

"Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light" (Matthew 11:28-30).

And I can't help think about this verse when I think about humbling myself:

The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise (Psalm 51:17).

vs. 19&20 – God is not impressed with man's wisdom or shrewdness. Again, I think of an Old Testament verse that bears this out:

This is what the LORD says: "Let not the wise man boast of his wisdom or the strong man boast of his strength or the rich man boast of his riches, but let him who boasts boast about this: that he understands and knows me, that I am the LORD, who exercises kindness, justice and righteousness on earth, for in these I delight," declares the LORD (Jeremiah 9:23-24).

True wisdom is knowing God and His ways, period.

vs. 21-23 – So Paul returned to his original issue and that was the division among the brethren as each claimed to belong to one of the church leaders and not to Christ. Paul urged them to expand their thinking, to see that every person who came to them in the name of Jesus had something to offer them that could be a blessing and help build them up. While the world's wisdom dictated that each person should identify with their leader and religious or educational "guru," God's wisdom urged each person to identify with Christ the Shepherd and receive each under-shepherd as a servant of Christ for their good.

I heard a man say once that man's soul is too big to be fed by just one person, spiritual leader or movement. We need all the gifts, not just the gifts that certain people or movements have. **Are you a person who belongs to Christ and His body or do you**

**belong to one of Christ's servants and part of the body? Don't answer too quickly. Allow the Lord to help you see the answer.**

#### **Day Four**

4:1 So then, men ought to regard us as servants of Christ and as those entrusted with the secret things of God. 2 Now it is required that those who have been given a trust must prove faithful. 3 I care very little if I am judged by you or by any human court; indeed, I do not even judge myself. 4 My conscience is clear, but that does not make me innocent. It is the Lord who judges me.

v. 1 – Paul was again reiterating that Peter, Apollos and he had not come to establish their own work or to secure their own followers. That is the wisdom of the world. Instead, Paul urged them to see each leader as a servant of Christ entrusted with truths that Jesus wanted those leaders to impart to the Corinthian church.

The word translated servants here is the also the word for “ministers.” Read what this word means:

The word *huperetees* means an under-rower, or one, who, in the trireme, quadrireme, or quinquereme galleys, rowed in one of the undermost benches; but it means also, as used by the Greek writers, any inferior officer or assistant. By the term here the apostle shows the Corinthians that, far from being heads and chiefs, he and his fellow apostles considered themselves only as inferior officers, employed under Christ; from whom alone they received their appointment their work, and their recompense. (from Adam Clarke's Commentary, Electronic Database. Copyright © 1996, 2003 by BibleSoft, Inc. All rights reserved.)

v. 2 – I feel like I have been entrusted with an aspect of the purpose message that is so prevalent in teaching circles. I began teaching this in 1991 and have continued for the last 15 years. I had nothing to do with this message; God gave it to me. And now that I have it, I must prove faithful and trustworthy to deliver it in ways that will help God's people and help God build His kingdom.

Paul considered himself a steward of the message he was given. Read what Adam Smith had to say about the word “steward:”

The steward, or *oikonomos*, was the master's deputy in regulating the concerns of the family, providing food for the household, seeing it served out at the proper times and seasons, and in proper quantities. He received all the cash, expended what was necessary for the support of the family, and kept exact accounts, which he was obliged at certain times to lay before the master. The mysteries, the doctrines of God, relative to the salvation of the world by the passion and death of Christ; and the inspiration, illumination, and purification of the soul by the Spirit of Christ, constituted a principal part of the divine treasure intrusted to the hands of the stewards by their heavenly Master; as the food that was to be dispensed at

proper times, seasons, and in proper proportions to the children and domestics of the church, which is the house of God. (from Adam Clarke's Commentary, Electronic Database. Copyright © 1996, 2003 by BibleSoft, Inc. All rights reserved.)

vs. 3&4 – Paul knew that ultimately he was responsible and accountable to God, who gave him this message and stewardship. Every leader will be criticized for what he or she does. Therefore, they must keep their eyes on the Lord and follow His directives for their ministry. Yet, this can make a leader aloof and even reckless in carrying out their work, so they must be gentle yet firm in their ministry. This is why godly leadership is such an exacting work.

### **Day Five**

5 Therefore judge nothing before the appointed time; wait till the Lord comes. He will bring to light what is hidden in darkness and will expose the motives of men's hearts. At that time each will receive his praise from God. 6 Now, brothers, I have applied these things to myself and Apollos for your benefit, so that you may learn from us the meaning of the saying, "Do not go beyond what is written." Then you will not take pride in one man over against another. 7 For who makes you different from anyone else? What do you have that you did not receive? And if you did receive it, why do you boast as though you did not?

v. 5 – It seems like this is a summary from Paul that began with his warning that each man's work will be tested with fire in chapter three. Don't be too quick to judge a leader or minister as being all good or all bad. Wait and see, wait until "the Lord comes." As we saw in chapter three, this may not refer to the literal return of the Lord, but rather to a time when He acts to reveal the motives behind the work that His workers are doing.

v. 6 – It seems that Paul substituted Apollos' name along with his (Paul's) as if they were heads of the sects in the Corinthian church, even though they were not. That means that there were some local leaders who were allowing their names to be used in such a manner as "ring leaders" or heads of disciple groups, thus creating schisms and divisions. Paul was not using the real names so that he could use this as an opportunity to teach and not just rebuke the guilty parties. I suppose he was giving these leaders room to repent without being singled out by name.

Paul urged that the Corinthians not take pride in one man over against another. All were equal and were nothing but servants of the Most High, carrying out their stewardship of the ministry they were assigned.

v. 7 – I wish every leader would take these words to heart! What's more, I need to take these things to heart. Whatever I have or do is because of Jesus. I can no more take credit for my ministry work than I can for my physical looks. God established all that, along with my spiritual gifts and abilities. Yet it is so easy to take pride in what one does spiritually, at least for me. I see this evidenced when I talk down to people. I believe I

am above them spiritually, therefore I condescend and speak harshly. That attitude says, “I earned what I have, and you are lazy. If you worked as hard as I, then you would be where I am. But because you haven’t, then I am in some ways superior to you.” That is a dangerous attitude. The next step is that I draw disciples after me, since my insight, work or ministry is superior to my fellow workers. Thus my pride becomes the source of the divisions as some follow this leader, others follow that one, some follow me, when we should all be diligent to direct the people’s hearts and affections toward Jesus.

Will you join me in the prayer below that God will help us be the leaders that He wants us to be, leaders that will follow in the steps of Paul and Apollos and make the impact that they made.

*Lord, whatever I have, You have given me. I have no right to be proud or boastful about what I have or have done, because it’s all from You, a gift to Your people and a privileged opportunity for me to serve You and them. So I ask Your forgiveness for this pride that clings to me, my attitude and my work. Lord, I don’t want to draw Your disciples away from You and toward me. I don’t want to cloak what I do in Your name, while at the same time carrying out my own agenda. Deliver me from myself as I represent You and work with Your people. Amen.*

### **Day Six**

8 Already you have all you want! Already you have become rich! You have become kings — and that without us! How I wish that you really had become kings so that we might be kings with you! 9 For it seems to me that God has put us apostles on display at the end of the procession, like men condemned to die in the arena. We have been made a spectacle to the whole universe, to angels as well as to men. 10 We are fools for Christ, but you are so wise in Christ! We are weak, but you are strong! You are honored, we are dishonored!

v. 8 – The real issue, as it is unfolding, is that the Corinthians were the ones who were proud, who were dividing the church based on each leader and their followers feeling that they had the superior doctrine or connection. Paul employed a bit of sarcasm here, don’t you think? He was chiding them for acting smug and superior. That is so hard not to do when you feel like you are seeing something that others may not be seeing. We must remind ourselves that if we are indeed “seeing” something, it is only because God opened our eyes or minds to see and understand it. It is no reason for pride or to consider ourselves better than other believers.

I stopped many years ago trying to be God’s German shepherd watchdog, trying to correct others and judging their acts and attitudes. I still have my preferences and I do think I have some insight that God has given me, but that doesn’t give me special privileges or entitle me to special standing among the saints. It just means that God, in His infinite grace, had mercy on me and revealed some aspect of His being or mind to me. What I have seen, however, is so small compared to who God is that I cannot even revel in my insight. It is puny compared to God.

v. 9 – There is much ado today about apostles and I believe that there are those so designated according to the will of God in the modern church. While I have heard much teaching on the subject, I have never heard an apostolic message on these next verses. Messages usually focus on the role and “authority” of the apostles. Here are my conclusions about modern-day apostles.

1. They should not be pastoring local churches *and* traveling to minister.
2. Their apostolic role should *not* be limited to the pulpit. They should be involved in helping churches solve problems, not speak and take home honoraria for their “work.”
3. They should be involved in church planting, both domestically and internationally.
4. They should have some specific emphasis that would benefit local churches, such as administration, teaching, structure, organization, or preaching. Their role, however, should not only be teaching and preaching.
5. They should be involved in training others to be more effective.
6. They should be servants, not lords.
7. They should train their successor.

v. 10 – Paul was telling these Corinthian ringleaders that they had assumed the wrong position, a position of supremacy. If they wanted to be apostles and leaders, they had to be abased, taking the low position and doing the unpleasant work of equipping the saints for the work of ministry.

**If you are a leader, is it time for a heart check? Do you resemble Paul or the Corinthian leaders as you lead and serve? Are you proud or a fool for Jesus? Are you weak or strong? Do you seek honor or dishonor? Don’t answer too quickly. Ask God to help you see yourself as you really are.**

### Day Seven

11 To this very hour we go hungry and thirsty, we are in rags, we are brutally treated, we are homeless. 12 We work hard with our own hands. When we are cursed, we bless; when we are persecuted, we endure it; 13 when we are slandered, we answer kindly. Up to this moment we have become the scum of the earth, the refuse of the world.

v. 11 – I wonder if this was the fate of the apostles in the early church or should apostles expect the same hardships today? I don’t think God is honored when his leaders endure such treatment, yet I don’t think He protects them from it either. I have seen many leaders work to ensure that they are never treated with such disrespect, and I wouldn’t want it either. Yet the urgency of the gospel message requires leaders who will pay any price to see souls saved and the kingdom of God advanced. **Are you willing to pay a great price to see the gospel furthered?**

I am paying the price I can, which is being away from home here in Africa for months at



a time, strengthening the saints and teaching His leaders. I get lonely, hungry and jetlagged. I have had to fight sickness far away from home, and learn to get along in foreign lands so that I could carry on my work, including these studies. **What price are you paying? Or are you focusing on the benefits of leadership and service? Are you requiring that men and women honor you for your work? I would rather have God honor me or direct others to bestow any honor on me, whatever that is.**

vs. 12&13 – Paul explained his response to the abuse he received. Notice it is exactly as Jesus taught us to respond:

But I tell you, do not resist an evil person. If someone strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also. And if someone wants to sue you and take your tunic, let him have your cloak as well. If someone forces you to go one mile, go with him two miles. Give to the one who asks you, and do not turn away from the one who wants to borrow from you. "You have heard that it was said, 'Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I tell you: Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be sons of your Father in heaven. He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous. If you love those who love you, what reward will you get? Are not even the tax collectors doing that? And if you greet only your brothers, what are you doing more than others? Do not even pagans do that? Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect (Matthew 5:39-48).

**Are you perfect as your Father is perfect? Are your responses His responses? Do you represent Him when you are wronged, especially as a leader?**

**Is the above passage too idealistic? Too other-worldly? Won't it mean that everyone will take advantage of you? Won't you lose everything if you do this when someone mistreats you? Won't you lose your leadership position?**

**It seems like this is just the behavior Paul was describing as he outlined the hardships of being an apostle. If Paul did it, shouldn't we do it as well? Was Jesus serious or were these just suggestions for the special few saints like St. Francis?**