

## First Epistle to the Corinthians

### 6 – Essay One: The Cross and Unity – Unity Revisited (1.4)

#### Part 1 of 2

1 Corinthians 3:1-4:16

1. Based on Bailey's Outline<sup>1</sup>
  - a. **A. The Problem: Divisions, Baptism, and the Cross (1:10-16)**
    - i. "I follow \_\_\_" is not a valid statement of identity for Christians – it divides
    - ii. "Our Lord Jesus Christ died for us" is the source of Christian community – it unites
    - iii. The cross is God's gift; baptism is the believer's receiving of God's gift
  - b. **B. The Wisdom and Power of God: The Cross (1:17-2:2)**
    - i. The cross of Christ is the center of Christian theology
      1. The cross is weakness and foolishness to those who reject it
      2. The cross is power and wisdom to those who believe
    - ii. Paul calls upon his audience to *why* they chose to believe
    - iii. Paul demonstrates ethnic unity through his skilled combining of rhetorical patterns
  - c. **B. The Wisdom of God: Revealed Through the Spirit (2:3-16)**
    - i. The cross reiterated as center of Paul's Christian theology
    - ii. Mystery of God's hidden wisdom is the cross of Christ
    - iii. The cross of Christ is vulnerability, weakness, and defeat according to the world
      1. But power according to the world is passing away
    - iv. Paul may not say "Trinity" but he writes in Trinitarian terms
      1. The concept of Trinity demonstrates unity that Christians ought to have
    - v. Both Reason and Spirit must be engaged to know God
    - vi. The purpose of the Christian is to impart the mystery of God to others
  - d. **A. Christian Unity: Paul, Apollos, and Cephas as One (3:1-4:16)**
2. Possible structures of 2:3-16
  - a. *ESVSB*
    - i. God's wisdom answers the problem (1:17b-4:21)
      1. God's Wisdom Applied to Apollos, Paul, and the Corinthians (3:1-4:21)
  - b. *Reading Corinthians*
    - i. Was Paul crucified for you? (1:17-3:4)
      1. What he did *not* teach, how he taught, why he did *not* teach some things (2:6-3:4)
        - a. (*Earlier parts omitted*)
        - b. Paul's response that they are not spiritual and mature (2:16b-3:4)
    - ii. Is Christ divided? (3:5-4:7)
      1. Missionaries are just servants [*diakonoi*] (3:5-23)
        - a. Illustration of field (3:6-9b)
        - b. Illustration of building (3:9c-15)
      2. Missionaries are just servants [*hyperetas*] and stewards [*oikonomous*] (4:1-7)
        - a. Corinthians had judged Paul to be an unfaithful servant (4:2)
        - b. Paul's response (4:3-5)
        - c. Summary statement for 3:5-4:7 (4:6-7)
    - iii. Conclusion (4:8-21)

---

<sup>1</sup> Kenneth E. Bailey, *Paul Through Mediterranean Eyes*; Kindle ed., location 679

- c. Bailey<sup>2</sup>
  - i. A. Paul and Apollos: It is about you (3:1-4)
  - ii. B. Parable of the field and the farmers (3:5-9)
  - iii. B. Parable of the builders and the building (3:10-17)
  - iv. A. Paul, Apollos, Cephas: It is about Christ (3:18-4:7)
  - v. Concluding thoughts (4:8-16)
- 3. Background information
  - a. Servants and stewards
    - i. Diakonoi: one who serves; a deacon
    - ii. Hyperetas: a subordinate
    - iii. Oikonomous: a hired manager or overseer
  - b. Temple
    - i. Hieron: overall Jerusalem temple complex
    - ii. Naos: The temple itself; the most sacred portions of the temple; the holy of holies, the dwelling place of God
      - 1. This is the word Paul uses in our current passage
  - c. Temple protection
    - i. Temple police, a mercenary force
    - ii. Divine curses on those who would violate the temple
      - 1. Stories/myths of those who violated the temple
      - 2. Paul issues a curse on those who would violate God's temple
  - d. Farming

In order to make his points clear, Paul offers an analogy wherein he casts himself and Apollos as laborers on a farm where God is the owner. The image was a common one in antiquity, for the world was essentially an agrarian economy in which even city dwellers were closely connected with farming. Indeed, in the first-century Mediterranean world, the majority of persons were slaves or servants on large, plantation-style enterprises. The lowest-ranking slave was the field hand who was directly involved with planting, watering, tending, and harvesting the crops. For Paul to apply this image to himself and Apollos is remarkable, for the picture is far from flattering.<sup>3</sup>

Table 1: From Bailey, loc. 1356

	1 Corinthians 3:1-4 (ESV)	Motif	Echoes of 1:10-16
1	<p><sup>1-3a</sup> But I, brothers<sup>4</sup>, could not address you as spiritual people, but as people of the flesh, as infants in Christ. I fed you with milk, not solid food, for you were not ready for it. And even now you are not yet ready, for you are still of the flesh.</p>	<p>Not ready</p> <p>Of the flesh</p> <p>Parable</p> <p>Milk and solid food</p> <p>Not ready</p> <p>Of the flesh</p>	<p>"I appeal to you, brothers"</p> <p>Solid food: Christ crucified</p>
2	<p><sup>3b</sup> For while there is jealousy and strife among you, are you not of the flesh and behaving only in a human way?</p>	<p>Jealousy and strife</p> <p>Of the flesh</p>	<p>Divisions and quarreling</p>

<sup>2</sup> Bailey, loc. 1349

<sup>3</sup> Marion L. Soards, *Understanding the Bible Commentary: 1 Corinthians*, entry on 1 Cor. 3:6; Baker Books, OliveTree e-book edition

<sup>4</sup> *And sisters*

	1 Corinthians 3:1-4 (ESV)	Motif	Echoes of 1:10-16
3	<sup>4</sup> For when one says, "I follow Paul," and another, "I follow Apollos," are you not being merely human?	Division Not spiritual	"I follow..."

4. Paul and Apollos: It is all about you! (3:1-4)<sup>5</sup>

- a. In preceding section Paul had just wrote about the "deep things of God," that he imparted them to the mature
- b. The Corinthians likely believed that they were mature and ready for the "deep things" and may have been accusing Paul of holding back
- c. Paul states that the Corinthians are not mature. They are "of the flesh." Not only that, but they are mere "infants."

He refers to the Corinthians with the Greek word *sarkinoi*, which means "made of flesh," implying that they give the appearance of belonging to this age rather than to the Spirit. In 3:3 Paul alters his language slightly... as he labels the Corinthians with the Greek word *sarkikoi*, which means "having the character of flesh," a term with ethical implications... He does not merely say they were children (Gk. *tekna*); they were immature—stuck in infancy, because they have sought human or worldly wisdom rather than focusing on the crucified Christ and the meaning of the message of the cross for their lives.<sup>6</sup>

d. Revisiting 1:5-7

I give thanks to my God always for you because of the grace of God that was given you in Christ Jesus, that in every way you were enriched in him in all speech and all knowledge—even as the testimony about Christ was confirmed among you—so that you are not lacking in any gift, as you wait for the revealing of our Lord Jesus Christ... (ESV)

- i. Is 3:1-4 in contradiction?
- ii. God had given the Corinthians all the necessary spiritual gifts, but they had failed to receive the gifts
- iii. Hence they lacked the Spirit and could not discern the "deep things of God" and Paul could not impart these things to them
- iv. He had given them "milk" but they had failed to even grow beyond infancy!
- e. Paul's measure of maturity
  - i. **Not** intellectual understanding of theology
  - ii. It is about the lack of appropriate ethical behavior
    1. Jealousy and strife...
      - a. Jealousy [*zelos*: wrong kind of zeal] – 13:4 as "envy" [*zeloo*]
      - b. Strife [*eris*: "quarreling" of 1:11 – Greek goddess Eris: war and strife]
    2. ... Instead of love
      - a. Paul is building his case for love, which reaches its pinnacle in chapter 13
      - b. The word translated "infants" [*nepios*] also occurs in chapter 13

<sup>5</sup> Bailey, loc. 1356

<sup>6</sup> *UBC:1 Corinthians*, entry on 1 Cor. 3:1

As children of the Enlightenment we have largely come to see the acquiring of truth as a head trip, and that a good mind and a willingness to work hard is all that is required to understand any form of truth, including theological truth. Paul disagrees.<sup>7</sup>

- f. Was the entire church quarreling?
  - i. Bailey suggests that it was actually a small part<sup>8</sup>
  - ii. His evidence is that this letter itself is “solid food” that Paul would not have sent if the entire church was in an upheaval
- g. Paul employs parenting imagery
  - i. He brings in the image of a mother
    - 1. Paul personifies himself as a mother (possibly affirming the value of women teachers)
    - 2. C.f., Isaiah 28:9, “To whom will he teach knowledge, and to whom will he explain the message? Those who are weaned from the milk, those taken from the breast?”
  - ii. At the close of the essay he uses the image of a father (4:15)
- h. Summary of 3:1-4
  - i. Truth (God’s wisdom) is learned through both intellect and ethical behavior experienced through community. It is impossible to understand God’s mysteries if a community is failing to grow in ethical behavior.
  - ii. Paul sees himself as mother (and later, father) of believing communities
  - iii. The Corinthians, by their claims, may have thought they were flattering their teachers, but in fact they were only revealing their own shortcomings

Table 2: From Bailey, loc. 1395

	1 Corinthians 3:5-9a (ESV)	Motifs	Echoes of 1:10-16
1 a b c d	<sup>5</sup> What then is Apollos? [Paul] <sup>9</sup> What is Paul? [Apollos] Servants through whom you believed, as the Lord assigned to each.	We are servants Assigned by the Lord	“I follow...”
2 e f g	<sup>6</sup> I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth.	We farm God gives growth	
3 e f g	<sup>7</sup> So neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God who gives the growth.	We are nothing God gives growth	Paul didn’t die for you
4 a b c d	<sup>8-9a</sup> He who plants and he who waters are one [equal], and each will receive his wages according to his labor. For we are God's fellow workers. [ <i>or</i> , for God]	We are equal servants Workers for God	United Same mind and judgment

<sup>7</sup> Bailey, loc. 1378

<sup>8</sup> Bailey, loc. 1380

<sup>9</sup> Bailey writes that in the Armenian, Ethiopian, and Syrian traditions the order is Paul, then Apollos. Even though there is strong textual evidence for the ordering of modern English translations, Bailey states that rhetorical analysis indicates that Paul, then Apollos is the correct ordering. He suggests a scribe may have misordered the names based on the proximity of Apollos in 3:4.

5. Parable of the field and farmers (3:5-9a)

- a. Structure: A-B-B-A, and *abcd-efg-efg-abcd*
  - i. Short, but very intricate and precise
- b. Influences on the parable
  - i. Isaiah 41:19; 44:3-4; 60:21; 61:3
    - 1. Agricultural and farming images
    - 2. God is the farmer and planter in these passages
    - 3. God plants Israel in the wilderness and brings forth growth through the Spirit for his glory
    - 4. Paul utilizes the imagery and adapts it: he takes the part of the farmer (as servant of God) and plants among the Gentiles, but God still grows the crop through his Spirit
  - ii. Possibly Jesus' parable of the sower (Luke 8:4-8)
- c. Paul contrasts his and Apollos' self-understandings with what some Corinthians think
  - i. Paul engages in sarcasm: "You're comparing your worth on who we are? We'll get the last laugh! We're nothing, and therefore, you're nothing."
  - ii. "We're not some exalted teacher or leader. We're just servants [*diakonoi*] of God."
- d. Paul and Apollos are teachers and leaders, but not of their own volition
  - i. The Lord assigns tasks – people accept
  - ii. Not all tasks are the same, and that's okay. Each one is necessary and valuable.

It is easy for evangelists and educators to each judge their task to be more important than the other. Evangelism at times reflect an anti-intellectual stance and judge Christian education as a waste of time. Some types of Christian educators look condescendingly at evangelists as semi-intelligent, misguided enthusiasts. Paul does not allow for either of these attitudes. For him the two ministries were equally valid.<sup>10</sup>

- iii. They are not trying to advance their own careers or make a name for themselves
  - 1. The difference between the kind of teacher/leader Paul and Apollos saw themselves vs. how the Corinthians saw them
- e. Paul was clearly more prominent than Apollos, but Paul sees himself as equal to Apollos
  - i. Whenever an individual starts to think themselves more important than another, strife develops
  - ii. Whenever a group starts to think themselves above another, strife develops
  - iii. All workers are equal – there is no competition
- f. God gives the growth
  - i. All growth in the community of believers – numerical, spiritual, etc. – is a gift, not a result of human efforts
  - ii. If we are faithful in our tasks, God will give growth
    - 1. But growth may not be what we expect or want to see
    - 2. Success ("wages") is not measured by results, but by faithfulness ("labor") to God's calling
- g. Paul and Apollos were ultimately responsible to God
  - i. They are servants of the church, but their ultimate allegiance is to be faithful to God
  - ii. Believers belong to physical communities and organizations, they have a responsibility to them, but ultimate allegiance is always to God

---

<sup>10</sup> Bailey, loc. 1428

6. A transition verse 9b, "You are God's field, God's building."
- a. However, Bailey suggests this may be the climax of this entire section<sup>11</sup>
  - b. Allusions: Jeremiah 1:10; Isaiah 61:4, 7
  - c. What this text does not say: to join Paul in planting and building
  - d. What this text does say: **You** are God's field (land) and building (temple)
    - i. Land and temple were the most important things in Jewish tradition
    - ii. The prophesied restoration of land and temple is the church, even with all its flaws
    - iii. Paul is affirming Hebrew prophecy, not rejecting it

[Paul] was not de-Zioning the tradition; rather he was *transforming it into a new form of Zionism* that needed no particular geography and no special building.<sup>12</sup>

7. Parable of building and builders (3:10-17)
- a. Jesus' parable of two builders (Luke 6:46-49)
    - i. One who hears and *does* will remain
    - ii. One who hears and *does not do* will be ruined
  - b. Isaiah 28:14-18 (chiastic poetry, center in v.16)
    - i. Israel made a faulty covenant with death and Sheol, takes refuge in lies and falsehood
      1. Claims no whip can harm her
    - ii. Center: God will lay a foundation and cornerstone of precious stones
    - iii. God will sweep away the refuge of lies and falsehood with a flood, the covenant with death and Sheol will be annulled
      1. Israel will be swept away by an overwhelming scourge
  - c. Dead Sea Scroll, *The Community Rule* (VIII)<sup>13</sup>

In the Council of the Community there shall be twelve men and three Priests, perfectly versed in all that is revealed of the Law, whose works shall be truth, righteousness, justice, loving kindness, and humility... When these are in Israel, the council of the Community shall be established in truth. It shall be an Everlasting Plantation, a House of Holiness for Israel... It shall be that tried wall, that *precious cornerstone*, whose foundations shall neither rock nor sway in their place.

- i. Qumran community claimed the prophetic promises of an everlasting plantation (land) and a foundation (building) for itself
  - ii. Paul claims these same promises, but in a different way
- d. Mishna
- i. During the first part of the building of the Second Temple in Jerusalem, as the Jewish authorities cleared away the rubble they found an elevated stone in the middle of the holy of holies.
 

After the ark was taken away a stone remained there from the time of the early prophets, and it was called "*Shetiyah*." It was higher than the ground by three fingerbreadths. On this he used to put [the fire-pan].
  - ii. *Shetiyah* means "foundation"
    1. This is the stone where, on the Jewish Day of Atonement, the high priest would place the pan of charcoal and incense

<sup>11</sup> Bailey, loc. 1442

<sup>12</sup> Bailey, loc. 1447

<sup>13</sup> Bailey, loc. 1454

- e. Paul draws from all of these images and allusions in his parable of the building and builders
  - i. Paul draws upon the importance of hearing and doing, he draws upon the key image of the foundation and cornerstone, and he identifies the foundation as Jesus Christ, and the building is the Third Temple – not a physical one, but a spiritual one that is being built up out of believing communities

Table 3: From Bailey, loc. 1476

1 Corinthians 3:10-17 (ESV)		Motifs
1	<sup>10-11</sup> 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. For no one can lay a foundation other than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ.	The Foundation Is Jesus Christ
2	<sup>12-13a</sup> Now if anyone builds on the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw—each one's work will become manifest...	Built On "The Foundation" Fireproof vs. flammable
3	<sup>13b</sup> for the Day will disclose it, because it will be revealed by fire, and the fire will test what sort of work each one has done.	Tested By fire
4	<sup>14-15</sup> If the work that anyone has built on the foundation survives, he will receive a reward. If anyone's work is burned up, he will suffer loss, though he himself will be saved, but only as through fire.	Built On "The Foundation" Survived / burned up
5 a b c c' b' a'	<sup>16-17</sup> Do you [ <i>plural</i> ] not know that you [ <i>plural</i> ] are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in you [ <i>plural</i> ]? If anyone [ <i>singular</i> ] destroys God's temple, God will destroy him [ <i>singular</i> ]. For God's temple is holy, and you [ <i>plural</i> ] are that temple.	The Temple Composed of you

- ii. Structure – ring composition (A-B-C-B-A)
  - 1. Section 5 is itself another ring composition
    - a. Idea of testing in section 3 loosely parallels idea of destroying
    - b. Both refer to Day of the Lord when all will be revealed
- iii. Paul describes himself now as a skilled master builder
  - 1. Skilled [*sophos*] – wise: claiming he does have true wisdom
  - 2. Paul was “graced” with the gift of planting churches<sup>14</sup>
  - 3. Just as Jesus, the Master, became a servant, Paul too, becomes a servant yet remains a master builder
  - 4. Paul laid the foundation – which is Jesus Christ
  - 5. After he left, others (e.g., Apollos) came in to build upon his work
  - 6. Paul did not have a problem with Apollos’ building, but he has concerns with some others in Corinth – these were either adding to, or taking away from, the cross of Christ

When Paul declares Jesus Christ to be the foundation of the church in Corinth, he is not attempting to assert all the christological concerns of later periods. But he does establish that Christian faith and practice are intricately bound to the person and work of Jesus Christ, especially Jesus' crucifixion. Paul located

<sup>14</sup> UBC: 1 Corinthians, entry for 3:10

salvation at the cross, and to lose sight of that reality was to pervert the truth of the gospel. The church cannot be refounded on a foundation other than Jesus Christ. Such a renovation is corruption or destruction, not expert building.<sup>15</sup>

iv. (1) and (5)

1. Paul had laid the foundation, other builders were working on the building
2. The building is not yet complete, but...
3. (5) reveals that the building is God's temple and the community of believers is that temple
4. Not only that but God's Spirit dwells in *this* temple
  - a. The Jerusalem temple is still operating – Paul is very daring, again
  - b. The Third Temple of believers is already operational, rendering the physical Second Temple at Jerusalem obsolete
    - i. Paul would severely offend any devout Jew if they understood what Paul was telling his readers
5. Middle Easterners take their sacred spaces seriously
  - a. Paul follows that tradition by invoking a curse in the middle of (5)
  - b. He also implies that the quarrels mentioned earlier are in danger of damaging the third temple, consequently going against God
6. Perhaps there is an implication of the singular and plural noun forms in v.17 that speak to the danger of individuality vs. belonging to a community

v. (2), (3), (4)

1. The image in (2) is that there are two builders – one bringing valuable metals and precious stones, the other cheap, flammable materials
  - a. Echoes of other “builder parables”
2. Corinth had experienced a firestorm when the Romans destroyed it in 146 BC
  - a. The image of the Day of the Lord coming to sift building materials would have been a concrete one for the Corinthians
  - b. When Paul was writing this letter, Corinth still would have been in the process of rebuilding (been going for a little over 100 years)
3. Josephus records that the temple doors on the Eastern side were of Corinthian brass which “greatly excelled those that were only covered over with silver and gold”<sup>16</sup>
  - a. Corinth had a strong tradition of valuable construction materials
4. When will each builder's work be revealed?
  - a. At the Judgment Day; i.e., no judgment need be passed before then
  - b. The builder will be saved, even if the work is revealed to be worthless

Paul is here dealing with divisions in the church at Corinth and the judgments that the various parties were making against one another. Such judgments *must be left* for “the Day,” knowing that the work of some will survive and the work of others will perish.<sup>17</sup>

<sup>15</sup> UBC: 1 Corinthians, entry for 3:11

<sup>16</sup> Bailey, loc. 1537

<sup>17</sup> Bailey, loc. 1549

Paul's words are a metaphor, which means that one cannot press the images. In the case of neither reward nor loss does Paul specify how and what is the difference. Rather, his discussion focuses on why there is a difference.<sup>18</sup>

f. Summary of 3:10-17<sup>19</sup>

- i. The church is both God's field (land) and building (temple) – physical Israel and temple are rendered obsolete
- ii. Paul is both servant and God's master builder
- iii. Jesus Christ is the foundation of the new temple
- iv. Some are builders who employ materials that last; others use poor materials – the day of judgment will reveal which is which
- v. Salvation is not dependent on the quality of work – all builders saved
- vi. Churches do not need to pass judgment on quality of work
- vii. God's Spirit dwells in a temple that is in the midst of construction
- viii. God will destroy anyone who tries to damage and destroy this third temple

The security of God's people is found not so much in their individuality ("if anyone destroys") as in their membership in the corporate people of God ("you are that temple"). God formed and God guards God's temple from destruction.<sup>20</sup>

Next time: Remaining two subsections and conclusion to the first essay

Archives: <http://corinthianessays.blogspot.com/>

---

<sup>18</sup> *UBC: 1 Corinthians*, entry for 3:14-15

<sup>19</sup> Bailey, loc. 1550

<sup>20</sup> *UBC: 1 Corinthians*, entry for 3:17