

# 1 COR. 3:5 – 6:11

By Ashby L. Camp

Copyright © 2006 by Ashby L. Camp. All rights reserved.

D. Leaders (like Paul and Apollos) are fellow workers in building God's church not competitors (3:5-9)

1. In response to those claiming allegiance to Apollos or to himself, Paul points out that they merely are servants of the one Lord, not lords themselves. As such, it is totally inappropriate for people to claim to belong to them.

2. Paul and Apollos simply were servants *through whom*, not *in whom*, the Corinthians came to believe, and they each worked according to the task given to him by Christ. In other words, though they were different, Christ had appointed both of them for the Corinthians' common good.

3. Paul planted the church in Corinth and Apollos thereafter had a teaching ministry among them, but the really important figure in the entire process was God who was causing the growth. They need to redirect their focus away from the servants to the one God they serve. He alone saves and sanctifies.

4. Since those over whom the Corinthians are bickering are servants under the one God, they (planter and waterer) are "one" in the sense that their mutual concern is for the growth of the crop to a rich harvest. They're on the same team and should not be pitted against one another.

5. And, as coworkers who belong to *God* and labor in *his* field (the Corinthian church), each will receive *from God* a reward commensurate with his own labor (praise from God - see, 4:5). Just as it's up to the owner rather than the field to reward one farmhand over another, so it's up to God rather than the Corinthians to reward one minister over another. (Paul is speaking, of course, of coworkers belonging to God not heretics.)

E. Caution and warning to those building on foundation laid by Paul (3:10-17)

1. Caution to build according to God's will (3:10-15)

a. Paul elaborates on the metaphor for the church (God's building) which he abruptly introduced at the end of 3:9. He says that he laid a foundation as a wise master-builder, meaning that he had preached Jesus Christ crucified, and now someone else is building on that foundation. This is not referring to Apollos because he is no longer there (see, 16:12).

b. Paul warns those in Corinth to watch out how they build on the foundation he laid. (Verse 11 makes clear that they do not have the option of laying another foundation.) As Garland (p. 115) says, "They can only add what the foundation will bear

and 'must not exceed the limits, or introduce confusions which would change the character of the building, so as to threaten its eventual collapse' (Derrett 1997: 133). They must use fit materials and follow the plans of the architect (who is God, not Paul) and the building code."

c. The truth about how they built or shaped the church by their teaching or influence will be revealed on the day of Christ's return.

(1) If they built the church according to God's will, according to how he wants the church to be, those changes would carry over into the consummated kingdom. They would not be lost in the purging of this age. In that case, they will receive their reward in the form of praise from God (see, 4:5).

(2) If they built the church in a way that was not suited for the consummated kingdom, if they created beliefs or practices that were inconsistent with God's eternal vision for the redeemed (such as a worldly perspective that leads to factions), the fruit of their labor will be purged at the consummation. In other words, that work was of no lasting value. They still will be saved, but only empty-handed, only as one who has escaped from a fire that consumed all his things.

## 2. Warning to any who would destroy the congregation (3:16-17)

a. Paul now issues a stern warning to any who would *destroy* the congregation in Corinth as opposed to incorrectly building it. There is a point at which incorrect teaching and practices threaten the very life of a congregation, threaten to terminate the group's union with Christ (see, Rev. 2:5, 3:16). The group simply ceases to exist as a church.

b. Anyone who so warps a church that it ceases to be one in the true sense will himself be destroyed by God. The church is God's holy temple, the place in which his Spirit dwells, and he will not ignore an assault on it.

c. Paul is content at this point simply to raise the potential of divine judgment without expressly placing the Corinthians' present conduct in that category.

## F. Warning about worldly wisdom and command not to boast in men (3:18-23)

1. In light of the dangers of warping the church (lost rewards and divine condemnation), Paul insists in 3:18-23 that none of them deceive themselves into thinking they are truly wise when they merely are wise by the standards of the world. That deception will lead to improper building on the foundation and possibly even to destruction of the congregation. Worldly wisdom is foolishness in God's sight, a fact testified to by Scripture. So they must become foolish in the world's eyes by accepting the wisdom of God.

2. Given that what passes for wisdom in the world is in reality (in God's sight) foolishness, there is no justification for using that wisdom, worldly evaluations, as a basis for boasting in one man over against another.

3. Such boasting in men, saying "I am of Paul" or "I am of Apollos," is further inappropriate because it contradicts the reality of being in Christ. In Christ, all things are *of you*, all things are *yours*. You do not belong to ministers; they belong to you -- they are your servants (3:5)!

a. As C. K. Barrett comments:

[The apostolic messengers] are not lords over God's people, but helpers of their joy (2 Cor. 1:24); they preach not themselves but Christ as the Lord; they are servants of Christ, and thus of the church (4:5). To attach oneself devotedly to one minister is thus not a proper expression of Christian humility, but a denial of the sovereignty of Christ. Naturally, when Christian teachers differ . . . the Christian must choose between them, but he will do so in accordance with the truth, and not on the personal grounds that he has decided to attach himself to one rather than the other. (p.95)

b. Not only Christian ministers but *all* things belong to those in Christ. The world, life and death, and the present and future belong to us because, by God's power, we are destined for eternal life on a recreated earth. Through Christ we have secured control over the tyrannies of mankind.

G. God's stewards are answerable to God, so until the Lord's return boasting in any of them is at best premature (4:1-5)

1. Paul says that he and the other ministers ought to be regarded as servants of Christ and as stewards of the mysteries (secret things) of God.

a. They do indeed "belong" to the Corinthians, but as he already suggested in 3:9, they first belong to God.

b. They had been entrusted with God's plan of salvation, a plan long hidden to human minds but now revealed in Christ.

2. What is sought in stewards is that they be faithful, worthy of the trust that has been placed in their care. God does not require eloquence, rhetorical prowess, or success but faithfulness to the trust. Whether Paul faithfully carried out his charge was something that God alone could judge.

3. Some in Corinth had been examining or investigating Paul, but Paul says that is of no consequence to him. In fact, all human judgments of his stewardship, even his own (although his conscience is clear), are irrelevant; the only judgment that counts is that of his Master, the one who gave him the trust.

4. The conclusion, therefore, is that the Corinthians must not conclude anything [about the greatness of any of their ministers], i.e., they must not idolize them, because when the Lord comes and brings all things to light, that praise may be shown to be misplaced. At that time each will receive his praise from God, the praise that counts -- there is thus no need for the Corinthians to boast in one of them now.

H. Command not to supplement the gospel with worldly wisdom and additional reasons not to factionalize over leaders (4:6-13)

1. They are not to supplement the gospel with a spirituality based in worldly wisdom, as that leads to factionalizing over leaders (4:6)

a. Paul explains that he has intended these changing images or metaphors (gardener, builder, steward) to apply to himself and Apollos, and he has done so "for their benefit." He wanted them to learn something and as a result to stop being puffed up in favor of the one and against the other.

b. He wanted them to learn the saying "Not beyond what has been written." This is obscure, but I take it as a reference to a saying that was well known in the Corinthian church, the gist of which was that they should not go beyond the gospel of Christ crucified and resurrected, which they had received "in accordance with the Scriptures" (15:3-4), by supplementing it with a spirituality based in worldly wisdom. Thiselton puts it like this (p. 355):

Paul warns the addressees that if they seek to go beyond what is written, the misguided attempt to "add to" the gospel of the cross by self-styled wisdom, rhetorical status-seeking, or self-styled "spirituality," the result will be an inflation of mere wind that will lead to taking sides, self-affirmation, and putting one group or its leaders against another.

2. The qualities in which they boast (or find attractive in leaders) were a gift from God not a personal achievement (4:7)

a. By boasting over against one another, they are acting like the qualities in which they boast (or find attractive in leaders) were some achievement of their own rather than something given to them by God.

b. Rather than being humbled by the grace of God and filled with gratitude for his gifts, they are arrogant and look down on those they perceive to be lacking them. Thiselton comments (p. 357), "a parent who gives a gift to a child hopes that the gift will bring joy, but not a reason to gloat over brothers or sisters, or to draw comparisons."

3. Their gravitating to leaders on the bases of social status and prestige in the present age, which is the root of their division, is inconsistent with the fact our exaltation as

Christians is still future. They are viewing the "now" too much in terms of the "not yet." (4:8-13).

a. What irony that the Corinthians are seeking and claiming status in the present world as wise, strong, and honored men, whereas the apostles are like those who bring up the rear of the procession into the gladiatorial ring, those doomed to die as the grand finale of a public spectacle.

b. The Corinthians are interested in status, but the apostles are willing to live as lowlives in this world, as foolish, weak, and dishonored men. They lack food, drink, proper clothing, and homes. They do unsophisticated menial labor. And they endure persecution, slander, and name-calling without making an issue of their honor, without fighting to defend their pride or insisting that they be vindicated in the eyes of the world. When reviled, they bless; when persecuted, they endure; when slandered, they speak kindly. The Corinthians are men of prestige, but the apostles are the filth of the world, the scum of all things!

c. There are contemporary manifestations of this triumphalist perspective, of thinking of the "now" too much in terms of the "not yet." After opining that the American church well may face a period of purification through suffering, Craig Blomberg writes (p. 99):

At the moment, however, we create uniquely Western heresies such as the so-called "health-and-wealth gospel," replete with its "name-it-and-claim-it" policies for prayer. Those who have immersed themselves in poverty-and-sickness-laden Third World cultures and their Christian communities find it almost incomprehensible how any one could believe such wholesale distortion of the Scriptures.

I. Admonishment and appeal to the congregation and a comment specifically to those opposing him (4:14-21)

1. Paul says that his goal is not to put them down but to admonish them as his beloved children. He wants them to follow his way in Christ rather than the way of worldly wisdom that was resulting not only in division but also in opposition to him.

2. In that regard, he appeals to the fact that he initially brought them the gospel. That distinguishes him from all who have come after him. The Corinthians may have had 10,000 trainers or guides or nannies in Christ, but he was the only one who fathered them.

3. As part of the effort to get them to become imitators of him (like father, like children), he dispatched Timothy, his "beloved and faithful child in the Lord," to them to remind them of his ways in Christ, to communicate to them what he taught in all the churches about the Christian life.

a. That life involves not only embracing the truths he has expressed, but also honoring God in the ways discussed in the subsequent sections.

b. The NIV translates 4:17 as a present tense ("I am sending") which suggests that Timothy is bringing 1 Corinthians, but he probably was sent some time earlier. That would explain why he is not mentioned in 1:1 and the suppositional nature of 16:10. Since sending Timothy, Paul has received the Corinthians' letter and information from Chloe's household that filled out the picture as to the real situation in Corinth. That is what prompts this letter.

4. In 4:18 Paul directs his comments to the group within the church that is opposed to him and is influencing the congregation in varying degrees.

a. They had gotten "an attitude" toward Paul, part of which was a claim that he had abandoned them.

b. Paul affirms that he will in fact come to them soon, if the Lord wills it, and at that time he will find out not the rhetoric of his opponents, not how well they fit the standards of worldly wisdom, but the spiritual power of their message, the power to convert and transform the lives of the poor lost sinner!

c. The kingdom of God, God's revolution on earth, is not about talk but about the power of God to transform lives. Paul's gospel saved and sanctified (see, 1 Cor. 6:9-11). As long as we live in this overlap of ages, in this time before the Second Coming, the new man in Christ continues to be subject to the influences of the powers of the old age. We still are pulled, tempted to live in Adam, and we must continually resist that temptation. Thus, Peter in 1 Pet. 2:11 warns the saints to abstain from base desires that war against their souls. But we do so as people who've been freed from enslavement to sin; we fight as those who've been healed of our "addiction to sin." And we do so in the power of the Spirit, as Paul emphasizes in Romans 8. We are not the same person in a new situation; we are a new person in a new situation.

5. As a lead in to chapters 5 & 6, Paul asks whether they will heed the appeal to follow his course in Christ, whether they will correct the things that need correcting. It's up to them. Do they prefer that he come needing to correct them ("rod" plays on the father/child imagery) or that he come in love and gentleness, with no need to chastise?

### III. Reported Problems in the Church (5:1 – 6:20)

#### A. Tolerating the man with his father's wife (5:1-13)

##### 1. The situation identified and the command to deal with it (5:1-5)

a. Paul turns to a clear contradiction of his way in Christ: a case of incest, that even pagans disallowed, is being tolerated or condoned within the church. A member of the church was having an ongoing sexual relationship with a woman who either

was or had been married to his father. According to Gordon Fee, the cohabiting of father and son with the same woman was forbidden by all ancients, Jew and pagan (p. 200).

b. Instead of being proud, they should have been grieved by this sin so that they removed from their midst the man who was doing this. In other words, they should have been appalled by the sin and kicked the rebel out of their fellowship instead of seeing their tolerance as something spiritual.

c. In contrast to their reaction, Paul, who though physically absent is with them in spirit, has already passed judgment on the man in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ (i.e., by his authority).

d. He therefore commands that when they "and his spirit" are assembled together, along with the power of the Lord Jesus Christ, they are to hand the man over to Satan.

(1) Their assembling "with his spirit" suggests a meeting in which Paul's mind on the matter is expressed or represented, perhaps by the reading of his letter.

(2) Their assembly is accompanied by the power of the Lord Jesus Christ to effectuate their sentence on the offender. When the community rightly expels a rebel, that sentence is bound in heaven by the power of Christ.

(3) "Handing one over to Satan" appears to be a Pauline reference to expelling one from the Christian community (see, 1 Tim. 1:20), certainly from the gatherings of the group for worship. To do so was to return the sinner to Satan's sphere, to the world outside the church.

(a) Paul anticipates that the result of the man's being put back into Satan's domain will be "the destruction of the flesh." The express purpose of the action is the man's redemption, "so that the spirit might be saved in the Day of the Lord."

(b) "Destruction of the flesh" is most likely a reference to the destruction of one's sinful nature, the person as oriented away from God. The separation of disfellowship is redemptive; it is to lead to repentance that the wayward might be saved.

## 2. Impropriety of boasting of their spirituality and exhortation to act (5:6-8)

a. Their boasting about their spirituality, in light of their sick condition, is totally out of place. Paul argues by analogy that they must remove the sinful man for their own sake, so that they may truly be the new people of God in Corinth.

b. He wants to know how they can be conceited when they are in imminent danger of being "spoiled" by the fermenting effect of the sin in their midst. We might say, "One bad apple spoils the whole barrel."

c. Shifting now to Passover imagery (removal of leaven - Ex. 12:15), Paul commands that they clean out the old leaven, the incestuous man, so that they might be a new batch of dough free from the leaven of such sin in their midst. But he quickly adds, "even as you are unleavened," meaning that by God's grace they were the pure and holy people of Corinth. In other words, his command is that they become in practice what they are by grace, i.e., God's new loaf in Corinth.

d. Keeping with the Passover imagery, Paul proceeds to explain how they became God's new loaf in Corinth: "For indeed, our Passover lamb, Christ, has been sacrificed." Through the death of our Lamb we have received forgiveness from the past and freedom for new life in Christ.

e. Maintaining the imagery of the Passover Feast, Paul in v. 8 broadens the application of the death of Christ to Christian life as a whole. Just as the Jews were forbidden to eat anything leavened during the seven-day festival, so God's people are to keep an ongoing feast of the celebration of God's forgiveness by holy living. They are to celebrate their new life in Christ without the "old leaven" of sin but with unleavened loaves of sincerity and truth, a life without sham or deceit that can stand the full test of the light of day.

### 3. Clarification of prior letter (5:9-13)

a. A previous letter from Paul had covered the matter of excluding such a person from their fellowship, but they managed to ignore that instruction by convincing themselves (or being convinced by "some who are arrogant") that it was unclear or even nonsensical.

b. Paul clarifies by saying the he of course did not mean they had to break association with *all* fornicators etc.; in that case, they would have to totally withdraw from the world, an act that would contradict the Christian call to be a positive influence on the world. As Jesus suggests in Jn. 17:15-16, Christians are to be in the world but not of the world.

c. So there will be no possibility of further misunderstanding, Paul outlines his position in explicit terms: they are not to associate with any Christian, any member of the church, who acts in the ways spoken of in his former letter. As Fee (p. 224) notes:

Paul is not advocating that only the sinless can be members of the Christian community; rather, he is concerned about those who persist in the very activities from which they have been freed through the sacrifice of the Paschal Lamb. Christians belong to the new age; their lives have been

invaded by the Holy Spirit. . . . [T]hose who belong to Christ must put off their former way of life (Col. 3:5-11). Those who persist in that former way of life, not those who simply struggle with former sins, do not belong to this new community. By their own actions they have opted out; the community must distance itself from such people for its own sake.

d. In v. 10 Paul refers to fornicators, the greedy and swindlers, and idolaters. In v. 11 he adds reviler (slanderer - NIV) and drunkard and separates greedy and swindlers.

(1) According to Fee (p. 224), "greedy" means not just to desire what is not one's own but often carries the sense of carrying through on the desire to the point of defrauding or taking advantage of someone else. This is supported by the fact "greedy and swindlers" in v. 10 are joined by an "and" and by the presence of fraud in the Corinthian church (6:7).

(2) Idolatry probably has in mind the insistence by some believers of their right to continue to attend meals at pagan temples, a matter addressed in chapters 8-10.

(3) Reviler or slanderer covers all forms of verbal abuse.

e. Paul concludes by saying the church must take the world as it finds it. In other words, we are not to judge the world in the sense of banishing it as we are to do in the case of repentant sinners within the church.

(1) God will sentence those outside the church. This does not mean, of course, that the church is not to speak prophetically to the world, to condemn the world for its injustices and unrighteousness. After all, that is why God will eventually judge it.

(2) As for the rebellious member of the church, Paul quotes Dt. 17:7, "Drive the wicked man from among you."

## B. Lawsuits among believers 6:1-11

1. Speaking of judging those inside the church, Paul addresses another type of judgment that must take place within the Christian community, namely in matters of everyday life where one member has a grievance against another.

2. Paul had apparently heard that at least one brother in the Corinthian church had been defrauded by another, and the aggrieved party took the offender before the civil magistrates at the "judgment seat," which was publicly located in the heart of the marketplace. This entire scene just fills Paul with indignation.

a. He wants to know how any Christian can dare to litigate a dispute before "the unrighteous" (unbelievers) instead of before the saints.

b. Do they (the church) not know that Christians are in some way going to be involved in God's final judgment on the world, when the entire anti-God system of things comes under his condemnation? Given that end-time reality, why are they acting as though they are unworthy to judge the smallest cases (meaning comparatively trivial disputes over possessions)?!!

c. Do they (the church) not know that Christians, through their involvement in God's end-time judgment, will even judge fallen angels? It should therefore go without saying that we should also be able to handle mere matters of business (matters of everyday life).

d. In v. 4 he asks, "If therefore you have such everyday disputes, how can you entrust jurisdiction to outsiders with no standing in the church?" (REB). They have no standing in the church because they are not sharers in the redeemed communities' view of reality. They are part of the world the church has rejected.

e. Paul tells them they ought to be ashamed for allowing this to go on. He then plays off their perception of themselves as being so "wise," and asks "Is it possible that there is nobody among you wise enough to judge a dispute among believers? But instead, one brother goes to law against another - and this in front of unbelievers!" (NIV).

3. In vv. 7-11 Paul turns from primarily shaming the community to primarily shaming the litigants themselves (though he speaks indirectly to them, employing the plural "you").

a. He says that the mere presence of lawsuits among them is already a complete defeat; no result of the litigation can redeem it. The defeat is in bringing the suit in the first place. That represents a gross failure of one's Christian perspective. It would be better simply to accept the wrong done to you than to go to the world for resolution. That is a denial of who we are as the people of God.

b. Not only does the plaintiff choose not to accept the wrong done to him, but the defendant actually engages in wrong and cheats people (thus motivating the lawsuit)! Paul sternly warns this unrighteous man, and all like him, not to be deceived but to realize that his rejection of the ethics of faith will keep him from participating in the consummated kingdom of God.

(1) Paul again references the six sins mentioned in 5:10-11 and adds (NIV) adulterers, male prostitutes, homosexual offenders, and thieves. The two words translated "male prostitutes" and "homosexual offenders" probably refer to both the active and passive participants in a male homosexual relationship.

(2) As incentive to live right, Paul reminds them that this is what some of them were, but they have since been redeemed - cleansed, made holy, and pronounced righteous. They now need to live consistently with that reality.