

Series on First Corinthians

23-0702a - 1 Corinthians 3:1-4, Scott Reynolds

Bible Readers: John Nousek and Kevin Woosley

These Sermon Notes by Scott Reynolds

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1 Corinthians 3:1-4, The Strong Church

I would like to share with you a sermon from Douglas Hamilton, preacher at the Junction City Church of Christ, Junction City, KS.

Scripture Readings:

1st Scripture Reading, John Nousek

Acts 18:1,11,18-22 (NKJV),

After these things Paul departed from Athens and went to Corinth...

¹¹ And he continued there a year and six months, teaching the word of God among them...

¹⁸ So Paul still remained a good while. Then he took leave of the brethren and sailed for Syria, and Priscilla and Aquila were with him. He had his hair cut off at Cenchrea, for he had taken a vow. ¹⁹ And he came to Ephesus, and left them there; but he himself entered the synagogue and reasoned with the Jews. ²⁰ When they asked him to stay a longer time with them, he did not consent, ²¹ but took leave of them, saying, "I must by all means keep this coming feast in Jerusalem; but I will return again to you, God willing." And he sailed from Ephesus. ²² And when he had landed at Caesarea, and gone up and greeted the church, he went down to Antioch. ²³ After he had spent some time there, he departed and went over the region of Galatia and Phrygia in order, strengthening all the disciples.

2nd Scripture Reading, Kevin Woosley

1 Corinthians 3:1-9 (NKJV),

And I, brethren, could not speak to you as to spiritual people but as to carnal, as to babes in Christ. ² I fed you with milk and not with solid food; for until now you were not able to receive it, and even now you are still not able; ³ for you are still carnal. For where there are envy, strife, and divisions among you, are you not carnal and behaving like mere men? ⁴ For when one says, "I am of Paul," and another, "I am of Apollos," are you not carnal?

⁵ Who then is Paul, and who is Apollos, but ministers through whom you believed, as the Lord gave to each one? ⁶ I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the increase. ⁷ So then neither he who plants is anything, nor he who waters, but God who gives the increase. ⁸ Now he who plants and he who waters are one, and each one will receive his own reward according to his own labor.

⁹ For we are God's fellow workers; you are God's field, you are God's building.

Chapter 3: The Strong Church

By Doug Hamilton, Junction City Church of Christ, Junction City, KS

[Doug Hamilton Video link](#)

Douglas Hamilton entitled his lesson on the 3rd chapter of 1st Corinthians: *The Strong Church*.

In 1 Corinthians chapter 1, we talked about "*The Strong Division and The Strong Wisdom of God*." In chapter 2, "*The Strong Gospel*." Today we are going to talk about "*The Strong Church*." Here's a spoiler alert: it has to do with **unity**. Because any church that isn't unified isn't strong. United we stand, but divided we fall is so true in many ways.

Chapter 3 The Strong Church

Some background history to this chapter comes from Acts chapter 18.

In Acts 18, the apostle Paul arrived at Corinth for the first time (*this is on his 2nd missionary journey*). The following is a basic timeline of his visit in Corinth and following.

- He met Priscilla and Aquila following their expulsion from Rome, along with all the other Jews that were expelled by Claudius Caesar in AD 49 (18:2).
- Working as tentmakers, Paul preached the gospel to the Jews every Sabbath for a short time until Silas, Timothy, and the other members of his mission team rejoined him from Philippi. Assisted with mission support from Philippi, he went full-time into the work to reach out to the gentiles in Corinth (18:3-6).
- With the blessing and encouragement from God (for, God says, I have many people in this city, 18:10), Paul stayed for about 18 months, teaching the word among the Corinthian Christians, laying a firm foundation of faith in Christ for this new congregation (18:11).
- When the pressure arose against Paul by some of the Jews, he moved on to complete his [sucessful] **Second Missionary Journey** by heading back to Caesarea

Acts 18:22 (ESV)

When he had landed at Caesarea (in Judea, not Caesarea Philippi in Galilee), he went up (the mountain traveling South) and greeted the church (in Jerusalem), and then went down (the mountain traveling North) to Antioch (in Syria).

→ Antioch (in Syria) was Paul's home church.

- He had successfully completed what he set out to do in the first place, planting new congregations and strengthening [them].

[Acts 18:22, ends Paul's 2nd journey. 18:23ff covers the time he spent in Caesarea saying, "having spent some time there..." and begins Paul's 3rd missionary journey.]

NOTE

There was no mention of Apollos in the work of the Corinthian church at that time. The church at Corinth was already well-established for about three years. It was in that [time frame in] which Apollos arrived.

Acts 18:23-28,

*And having spent some time there [in Antioch], he left and passed successively through the Galatian region and Phrygia, strengthening all the disciples. ²⁴ Now a Jew named **Apollos**, an Alexandrian by birth, an eloquent man, came to Ephesus; and he was mighty in the Scriptures. ²⁵ This man had been instructed in the way of the Lord; and being fervent in spirit, he **was speaking and teaching accurately the things concerning Jesus**, being acquainted only with the baptism of John; ²⁶ and he began to speak out boldly in the synagogue. But when **Priscilla and Aquila** heard him, they took him aside and **explained to him the way of God more accurately.** ²⁷ And when he wanted to go across to Achaia, the brethren encouraged him and wrote to the disciples to welcome him; and when he had arrived, he greatly helped those who had believed through grace, ²⁸ for he powerfully refuted the Jews in public, **demonstrating by the Scriptures that Jesus was the Christ.***

It was on the third missionary journey [in] which a disciple named Apollos was discovered by Priscilla and Aquila.

Verses 24,25 stated **he was...**

- [An Alexandrian, that is, he was f]rom Alexandria, Egypt, the most educated city in the world. This city also had the largest library on the earth at the time. To say that you came from Alexandria meant something concerning mental preparedness.
- Was an eloquent man, demonstrating a high level of education.
- Mighty in the Scriptures, for he was well-versed in the Old Testament texts. He obviously had spent some time in study of the sacred writings.
- Instructed in the way of the Lord, showing that he had been taught information from Christians along the way.
- Speaking and teaching **accurately** the things concerning Jesus, showing that He had learned much about the life and times of Christ.
- Was not properly taught concerning baptism, for he had only known of the obsolete baptism of John the baptist.

Priscilla and Aquila saw great potential in Apollos, recognizing him as a messenger of the gospel, but needing to talk with him privately about **a flaw**.

SR:

*[This is where I take exception with Douglas here. In no way, shape, or form does the Bible indicate that the message Apollos presented **was flawed**. Flawed implies his message was in error and the Bible nowhere suggests that! In fact, the Bible **emphatically** states that he taught **accurately** the things about Jesus, (18:25). The Bible does indicate that his message was incomplete, but what he taught was accurate.]*

They obviously explained to him the details of Christ's command to be baptized in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit for the remission of his sins. Combined with the fact that the first text in Acts 19 presents a similar situation,

Acts 19:1-8 (ESV)

And it happened that while Apollos was at Corinth, Paul passed through the inland country and

came to Ephesus. There he found some disciples. ² And he said to them, "Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?" And they said, "No, we have not even heard that there is a Holy Spirit." ³ And he said, "Into what then were you baptized?" They said, "Into John's baptism." ⁴ And Paul said, "John baptized with the baptism of repentance, telling the people to believe in the one who was to come after him, that is, Jesus." ⁵ On hearing this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. ⁶ And when Paul had laid his hands on them, the Holy Spirit came on them, and they began speaking in tongues and prophesying. ⁷ There were about twelve men in all. ⁸ And he entered the synagogue and for three months spoke boldly, reasoning and persuading them about the kingdom of God.

We must assume, therefore, that Apollos was re-baptized after being shown a way of God more accurately (18:26).

SR:

*[And all that is probably true, since he knew only John's baptism, why pull him aside to instruct him more accurately if you don't talk about Christian baptism? However, notice the language, Apollos taught **accurately**, Priscilla & Aquila explained to him **more accurately** It doesn't say Apollos was wrong and Priscilla & Aquila were right! I think we need to allow for the **transformation** process (Romans 12:2).*

Romans 12:2 (ESV)

Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.

Transformation by the renewing of one's mind is a growth process, it takes time. Is it a flaw if you don't know everything all at once? Are you in error if your knowledge is accurate but incomplete?

*I think we go a little bit beyond what is written when we call that **flawed**.]*

After a lengthy discussion with Priscilla and Aquila, Apollos desired to go to a place where his skill set would be best used. It appears he was effective through public debate, being able to shut down the hostile Jews that adamantly and openly worked against them (27-28). For more than three years, the Corinthian church had built their congregation on the firm foundation laid by Paul.

1 Corinthians 3:1-3,

And I, brethren, could not speak to you as to spiritual men, but as to men of flesh, as to infants in Christ. ² I gave you milk to drink, not solid food; for you were not yet able to receive it. Indeed, even now you are not yet able, ³ for you are still fleshly. For since there is jealousy and strife among you, are you not fleshly, and are you not walking like mere men?

SR

I'll give you my take on this passage and then Douglas' thoughts... Paul addresses the Corinthians, "not as spiritual men, but men of flesh," (i.e. worldly - NIV) as infants in Christ. There are two realms: spiritual & physical (the physical being the fleshly, worldly realm).

As new Christians we start out as worldly, steeped in (i.e. to be surrounded or filled with a quality or influence of) the physical world. We are told that as Christians, through the renewing of our mind, we are to be transformed from the world (Romans 12:2) and be conformed to the image of His Son, Jesus Christ (Romans 8:29).

Transformation is a process. A learning process, through the renewing of our mind. And that's why Paul gave the Corinthians milk, not solid food; for he says, "you were not yet able to receive it." Does this sound familiar? Hebrews also tells us about milk and solid food. Hebrews 5:11-14 informs us that milk, the elementary teachings about Christ, is for infants in Christ (i.e. new Christians). Solid food is for mature Christians. Hebrews 6:1,2 identifies six elementary teachings about Christ. These are the things Paul probably was teaching the Corinthians.

Paul was concerned that the Corinthians were STILL not yet able to receive solid food because they were still fleshly, worldly. How did he know that? For, he says, "since there is jealousy and strife among you, are you not fleshly,... walking like mere men?" (1 Cor 3:3). Their behavior, their actions, indicated that they were still worldly and not spiritual. Jealousy and strife are worldly actions, things from which we need to be transformed. From the greek word for transform we get the english word: metamorphose. The process of transforming is metamorphosis. Jealousy and strife can be likened to actions in the caterpillar stage, before metamorphosis, the transformation has not taken place... yet. If we haven't metamorphosed yet then we are unable to receive the solid food for the mature.

Douglas continues

In chapters 1 and 2, the Corinthians appeared divisive in their approach to each other. It was a culture who elevated great sophists speakers, demonstrating their superior debate skills. Apollos had taken the lead in the continuance of spiritual growth for the Corinthians and they began to see him as a more eloquent speaker than the apostle Paul.

Many of the church members were downplaying Paul's apostleship based on his less eloquent style of speaking.

2 Corinthians 10:10

For they say, "His letters are weighty and strong, but his personal presence is unimpressive and his speech contemptible."

Equally, the Apostle Peter was lumped into the sophist rating system, being mentioned in 1:12. This would be dealt with in Paul's correspondence. The Corinthian church was a divided, dysfunctional, group. Within the remainder of the chapter are four thoughts that eliminate division from within a congregation.

Just like division occurred in the first-century Corinthian church, the same can happen to the twenty-first century church. How do churches effectively deal with division? There are 4 realizations God's people must embrace [for] ... **Dealing with Division in the Church**

Invitation

We are extending the invitation, now, to anyone who is subject to it. If you need to, **Come**,... while we stand and sing.