

Believers (the Church) as God's Temple

Lesson Scripture: 1 Corinthians 3:1-23

Focus Scripture: 1 Corinthians 3:10-23

Key Verse: No one can lay any foundation other than the one that has been laid; that foundation is Jesus Christ. 1 Corinthians 3:11

1 CORINTHIANS 3:10-23 (NRSV UE)

10 According to the grace of God given to me, like a wise master builder I laid a foundation, and someone else is building on it. Let each builder choose with care how to build on it.

11 For no one can lay any foundation other than the one that has been laid; that foundation is Jesus Christ.

12 Now if anyone builds on the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw—

13 the work of each builder will become visible, for the day will disclose it, because it will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test what sort of work each has done.

14 If the work that someone has built on the foundation survives, the builder will receive a wage.

15 If the work is burned up, the builder will suffer loss; the builder will be saved, but only as through fire.

16 Do you not know that you are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in you?

17 If anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy that person. For God's temple is holy, and you are that temple.

18 Do not deceive yourselves. If you think that you are wise in this age, you should become fools so that you may become wise.

19 For the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God. For it is written, "He catches the wise in their craftiness,"

20 and again, "The Lord knows the thoughts of the wise, that they are futile."

21 So let no one boast about people. For all

1 CORINTHIANS 3:10-23 (KJV)

10 According to the grace of God which is given unto me, as a wise masterbuilder, I have laid the foundation, and another buildeth thereon. But let every man take heed how he buildeth thereupon.

11 For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ.

12 Now if any man build upon this foundation gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, stubble;

13 Every man's work shall be made manifest: for the day shall declare it, because it shall be revealed by fire; and the fire shall try every man's work of what sort it is.

14 If any man's work abide which he hath built thereupon, he shall receive a reward.

15 If any man's work shall be burned, he shall suffer loss: but he himself shall be saved; yet so as by fire.

16 Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you?

17 If any man defile the temple of God, him shall God destroy; for the temple of God is holy, which temple ye are.

18 Let no man deceive himself. If any man among you seemeth to be wise in this world, let him become a fool, that he may be wise.

19 For the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God. For it is written, He taketh the wise in their own craftiness.

20 And again, The Lord knoweth the thoughts of the wise, that they are vain.

21 Therefore let no man glory in men. For 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 Christ's, and Christ is God's.

things are yours;

22 Whether Paul, or Apollos, or Cephas, or the world, or life, or death, or things present, or things to come; all are yours;

23 And ye are Christ's; and Christ is God's.

KEY TERMS

- **Foundation** – The lowest load-bearing part of a building; an underlying basis or principle.
- **Builder** – The constructor, maker; one whose job is to construct, produce, or formulate an object, system, or idea.

INTRODUCTION

Launching this final section, unit III, we will review the biblical understanding of sacrifice from a metaphorical perspective. In the Jewish tradition according to Mosaic laws, animal sacrifices are used to atone for sin, acknowledge the

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even most abstract of perspectives. What is presented in this first lesson is Paul's struggle to reason with Christians of the early church, who attached to traditional labels and definitions of sacrifice. Paul teaches through the epistles that their understanding of this new belief is becoming muddled

with human desires and needs that reinforce the sinful behavior of envy and jealousy. As is done in most of Paul's letters, Paul attempts to guide the early church in practices and beliefs that will build a strong, unified community. This is necessary, especially in times of intense scrutiny and persecution that could undermine the Gospel message and weaken the body

of Christ. They are led to realize that each new believer becomes the remake of the temple, and that God's Spirit does not reside in manmade objects, or is limited to use by select key leaders. The community is birthed into a new theological paradigm that removes the authoritative model that encompasses status and heredity and replaces it with a

communal model that promises more power and a greater reward for all who believe.

TELLING THE BIBLE STORY

In this letter to the church community in Corinth, Paul speaks to the issue of disunity in the church. In the initial verses of chapter 3, Paul admonishes their childish spirituality that is ambivalent to the damage of their quarreling and competitive behavior. Paul addresses the division within the church

and states that all are co-workers. As he continues, he uses the imagery of common roles that the people will recognize. This is similar to the methods used by Christ in the use of parables. Paul draws from two separate vocations, the gardener and the builder. In the first example, Paul strategically reminds the congregation that neither he nor Apollos are to be considered the main

authority, nor the one who promotes growth. He plants, Apollos waters, and God is the true source of growth. In the latter example of the builder, he reminds them that the foundation is the most important part of a structure. In this case, every believer becomes a temple for God. The foundation is not built on other people, but solely on Jesus Christ. They are

reminded that God's temple is holy and any attempts to destroy it will be met by the wrath of God. Paul then continues the discussion of spiritual maturity by challenging their belief in their own wisdom. Paul states that the wisdom of man is easily questioned and rebuffed by the wisdom of God. Those who are true vessels of God do not need to brag or bring attention to themselves. God knows the thoughts of everyone, including the occurrences of today as well as the outcomes

of the future. This also suggests that the church was experiencing underlying deceitful plans and actions that he was not fully aware of, but fully trusted that God knew. The letter was clear that Paul was not concerned about the thoughts or plans of men. Paul understood that as a vessel for God, anyone who challenged him would have to take account with God.

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SANKOFA

And if a house is divided against itself, that house will not be able to stand. Mark 3:25 NRSV UE

Throughout history, all cultures have had a saying that resembles these wise words

from Jesus in Mark chapter 3. The power of a unified group cannot be understated. There is an African proverb that says, "If you want to go fast, go alone. If you want to go far, go together." This tells us that a unified group utilizes the skills of everyone, strengthening the group to endure hardships and difficulties, and ward off dangers that one could not do alone. Nature also frequently illustrates the power of a collective group. A flock of Canadian geese can travel hundreds of miles in a day if weather permits, at a rate of 40 miles per hour during migration.

Migrating groups can consist of thirty to one hundred birds, as the lead role in flight frequently changes to maximize their ability to fly farther and longer. Other animals such as elephants, buffalo, zebra, and horses travel in herds for protection. And fire ants can survive the most severe natural disasters

like floodwaters. By building a mound from their own bodies, they can escape as well as evacuate the colony's babies (larvae and pupae) and carry them to the surface. Humans, however, recognize the strength of a collective group, but are also territorial. History presents more examples of wars, conflicts, and colonization than examples of embracing a philosophy of trust and

collaboration. The Bible offers the simple explanation of sin. From the earliest tales of humanity, whether taken literally or not, we see how easily greed and corruption divide families and communities. Satan's strategy has always been to tear humanity away from a loving God and from one another. The Bible is able to provide us a ray of hope through the divine hand of God to instruct, correct, and guide us away from our sinful nature. We are stronger together. The church is stronger as a community, rather than when

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we are divided. Our future depends on embracing that wisdom and following the instincts seen in nature. Most importantly, we must understand our foundation of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. The good news of love and redemption embodied through the power of the Holy Spirit guides us like a compass to the will of God and to eternal life.

CASE STUDY

In 1966, Don Haskins was the head coach of the Texas Western Miners who went on to win the 1965-1966 NCAA Tournament with a 23-1 record. Haskins and the Texas team were historical for two primary reasons. First, Haskins made the decision that instead of building his team based on race, he built

the team based on talent. The result was selecting a predominantly black team. The majority of other coaches had always built an all-white team. However, this team would be the only one with an all-black starting line-up in the NCAA title game.

Despite the intense racial tension that continued to build in the south, the new diverse line-up continued to win. Residents in the town initially objected and were highly critical of the decision. But the team became so dominant that it began to win acceptance from others. It would still remain a constant struggle with not simply racial slurs but even threats and attacks. However, the issues and obstacles they faced appeared to make them stronger, building a team that would go on to win the national championship.

This true story later was memorialized in a book and an award-winning movie titled *Glory Road*. It illustrates the struggles and obstacles faced by black people in American history, but it also presents the victories. The power of unity can overcome the greatest odds. The intense anxiety and threats had

each player looking to their teammates for protection. Through teamwork and hard-fought plays, the team exceeded everyone's expectations and did what others saw as impossible.

The glory of a winning basketball season is one thing. But it cannot be compared to the glory of the Lord. As Paul wrote to the church

in Rome, "I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory about to be revealed to us" (Rom. 8:18).

LIFE APPLICATION

This lesson points out the dangers of a divided church community. It is natural for human beings to have a difference of opinion, even in church. Different perspectives and views may provide alternative approaches that can be beneficial to ministry goals. Differences can be presented in a respectful

and loving way. Therefore, the church should model a high functioning organization that promotes healthy communications, embraces creativity, is inclusive of all ages, and incorporates an atmosphere that is

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encouraging, motivating, and unifying. Every member of the church is responsible for promoting a loving culture. When there is a concern that arises in the church, ask the question, "What would Jesus do?" And of course, always pray that the Holy Spirit will guide the church to be a unified body.

*African Methodist Episcopal Church (AMEC)
Hymnal*

CLOSING PRAYER:

"If, then, there is any comfort in Christ, any consolation from love, any partnership in the Spirit, any tender affection and sympathy, make my joy complete: be of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind." Lord, we deeply and fervently pray for unity in the body of Christ. Give us a spirit of peace, love, and the joy that can only come from you. Use us as a beacon of hope for this world which is severely divided. And let our hearts be joined by the power of your Spirit. This we pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

(Phil. 2:1-2 NRSV UE)

QUESTIONS

1. How can your local church be more open to diversity?
2. What issues or problems have been resolved in your local church that demonstrate the desire for unity in the body?

CLOSING DEVOTIONS

Closing Hymn or Song of Praise

"Blest Be the That Binds" – Hymn #522,

HOME DAILY BIBLE READINGS

August 4-August 10

Monday	Genesis 2:4-7, 18-25 (God Creates Man and Woman)
Tuesday	Psalms 90:1-12 (Life Is Short; Live Wisely)
Wednesday	1 Corinthians 10:23-33 (Live Gloriously)
Thursday	1 Timothy 4:1-5 (Receive God's Gifts With Thanksgiving)
Friday	Psalms 139:1-12 (No Hiding Place From God)
Saturday	Psalms 139:13-24 (Fearfully and Wonderfully Made)
Sunday	1 Corinthians 6:12-20 (A Temple of the Holy Spirit)