

I Corinthians 3:1-4:21 – Correcting the Problem

A. Outline^A

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^A Major outlines from Thinking Through the Bible by Rev’d. Dr. John McNicol © 1944

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B. 3:1-4:21 **Correcting the Problem** (Sections here have been temporarily hidden.)

- I. 3:1-9 **Correcting their perspective; Progress from immaturity to maturity; Building of man & Christ**
 - a. 3:1-4 **Their Problem Diagnosed; Proof of Immaturity; Stumbling-block of Pride**

¹ And I, brethren, could not speak to you as to spiritual men, but as to men of flesh, as to babes 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? ⁴ For when one says, “I am of Paul,” and another, “I am of Apollos,” are you not mere men? ^B

- i. Verse 1 – Their carnality; Still spiritual babes; Babes in Christ. **How do individuals hold back the progress of the (local) church? – by:- lack of spiritual growth; lack of working faith; bringing in worldly distractions, desires**
 - ii. Verse 2 – Their poor digestion; Stuck in natural realm; Milk not solid food. **What does ‘milk’ teaching mean here (see Hebrews 6:1-2)? – first principles; milk is instinctive to new-born, but solid food a child needs teaching & instruction**
 - iii. Verse 3 – Marked by envy, strife & division; Carnally driven, still in squalor; Jealous & strife reveals their immaturity. **Give biblical opposites to envy: (charity, selflessness, liberality); strife: (peace, brotherly kindness, love); division: (unity).**
 - iv. Verse 4 – Shown by party spirit; Involved in petty carnal dissension; Factions are worldly. **What marks some Christians as ‘mere men’? – having factions; their focus is on men; trusting or following imperfect man; making external comparisons**
- b. 3:5-9 **Why factions are foolish; God’s fellow workers; Building the Church**

⁵ What then is Apollos? And what is Paul? Servants through whom you believed, even as the Lord gave *opportunity* to each one. ⁶ I planted, Apollos watered, but God was causing the growth. ⁷ So then neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but God who causes the growth. ⁸ Now he who plants and he who waters are one; but each will receive his own reward according to his own labour. ⁹ For we are God’s fellow workers; you are God’s field, God’s building. ^B

- i. Verse 5 – Role of Apollos & Paul; Apollos & Paul are God’s servants; Godly servants sensitive to God’s motivation – Note the italics; is there a better word? – choice, situation, talent/gift/ability, calling; for Paul, evangelist; for Apollos, teacher, apologist.
- ii. Verse 6 – The Divine tasks; Differing gifts, same God; All necessary; God’s Increase – **What ministry corresponds to planting? evangelism ... to watering? teaching, strengthening**
- iii. Verse 7 – It is God’s work; It is God’s role that counts; God is the power

Source of growth. – which Person of the Trinity leads in vv 5-7 (Jn 6⁶³, 2 Cor 3⁶)? God the Holy Spirit gives life (reff.), regeneration (Tit 3⁵, Jn 3³⁻⁸), ministries (1 Cor 12).

iv. Verse 8 – Each task worthy (of reward); Unity of servants; Servants are rewarded on basis of (using) their God-given gift (ministry) – How does this run contrary to the world's thinking? – man thinks (1) the world owes him a living; (2) his own labours worth more, labour of others worth less, than they receive.

v. Verse 9 – Working in God's work; We work as God guides & prods us; Corinthian church pictures as God's field or building. – how does each picture here illustrate the church? Field: its slow gradual growth; Building: built with living stones one by one. ... what is the church? – Christ's body of believers, God's children

2. 3:10-23 Realising God's Church; Avoid Worldly Wisdom; Our Place in the Church
a. 3:10-15 Build Wisely; The Work / Art of Church-Building / Building the Church

¹⁰ According to the grace of God which was given to me, as a wise master builder I laid a foundation, and another is building upon it. But let each man be careful how he builds upon it.
¹¹ For no man can lay a foundation other than the one which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. ¹² Now if any man builds upon the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw,
¹³ each man's work will become evident; for the day will show it, because it is to be revealed with fire; and the fire itself will test the quality of each man's work. ¹⁴ If any man's work which he has built upon it remains, he shall receive a reward. ¹⁵ If any man's work is burned up, he shall suffer loss; but he himself shall be saved, yet so as through fire.

- i. Verse 10 – Paul: a wise architect; Building; Beware as we add our gift to the building since God oversees; Building Wisely & carefully; Beware how we build.
1) What is the basis of our choice of Christian service? (God's) grace
2) What are some phases of Christian ministry? – Evangelism, missions, planting, apologetics, teaching, nurturing.
- ii. Verse 11 – The real Foundation; Jesus is the Foundation; Building is founded on work of Christ
1) What is the touch-stone of Christian orthodoxy (cf., Matthew 22:42)? – 'What think ye of Christ ...' – the nature of Christ in His incarnation; heresies deny either His deity or His humanity.
- iii. Verse 12 – (Choosing) building Materials; Additions to the Foundation.
1) What is the proof of true service? – the materials used to build; what it costs personally; the involvement of love, hope & faith
- iv. Verse 13 – Testing the building; Testing the structure; Judgement; Fire tests quality; Lasting works survives inspection.
1) What day will show this to be the case? – the Judgement (that term being neutral, encompassing both approval and condemnation)
- v. Verse 14 – prize to good builders; If work remains, a reward is given; Lasting

work rewarded.

- 1) What will constitute this reward (consider Php 3:12; 4:1, 3 John 4; 2 Tim 4:8)? – seeing life changes in a person (Paul calling the Philippians 'my crown'); the Master's 'well done'; the crown of righteousness
- vi. Verse 15 – Differing between man & his work; We may suffer loss but Christ will bring us through the fire; Careless builders survive (barely).
1) What things does this reveal about the believer's security (cf., Gal 3:3)? – it is a fact!; when works are judged the Christian is not (if we take 'judge' meaning to punish); spiritual status depends on God's grace, not works.

- b. 3:16-23 – 3 Summary Truths; 3 Great Reminders; True Temple, Wisdom, Owner

¹⁶ Do you* not know that you* are a temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwells in you?
¹⁷ If any man destroys[†] the temple of God, God will destroy[†] him, for the* temple of God is holy, and that is what you* are. * ye – that is, plural (of the church body), but temple is singular

† destroy: waste, damage, injure; ‡ there is no article "the" in the Greek
¹⁸ Let no man deceive himself. If any man among you thinks that he is wise in this age, let him become foolish that he may become wise. ¹⁹ For the wisdom of this world is foolishness before God. For it is written, "He is the One who catches the wise in their craftiness"; ²⁰ and again, "The Lord knows the reasonings of the wise, that they are useless."

²¹ So then let no one boast in men. For all things belong to you, ²² whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas or the world or life or death or things present or things to come; all things belong to you, ²³ and you belong to Christ; and Christ belongs to God."

- i. Verse 16 – Being God's Temple; The Spirit of God is within, tread softly! Believers are a temple of God indwelt by the Spirit.
1) What important lesson is here about the church? – (Imperfect) believers comprise the Church (God's temple); The local church made up of united Christians; There is a mystical union of believers wherein the Spirit dwells; it exists universally, it is experienced locally..
- ii. Verse 17 – God protects His holy Temple; Why we should tread softly.
1) What important lesson ... about the church? – God protects the local church with same fervour as He does the church universal. Each local church ("a temple") is a significant part of the whole church.
- iii. Verse 18 – Discard worldly wisdom; God's wisdom completely overwhelms man's; Don't be trapped into man's wisdom; Worldly wisdom is deceptive.
1) What is commanded here? – Don't get side-tracked with man's wisdom; Don't be fooled; Get undeceived, get wise!
- iv. Verse 19 – Devalued wisdom; Wisdom of man foolishness in God's sight; Worldly wisdom is foolish from God's perspective; "James 1:5"
- v. Verse 20 – Impotent wisdom; Worldly wisdom is useless

vi. Verse 21a – Don't overvalue human leaders; Don't boast; "2 Corinthians 4:5, Paul an example for this verse"

1) Why is that command appropriate for Christians? – Because we are inclined to exalt others we see over Christ whom we do not now see; Focus on God; Beware if 'preacher becomes god' for man fails

vii. Verse 21b-22 – Everything is the church's; The temple of God All things are yours (i.e, the church's)

viii. Verse 23 – Possessions transferred upward; We are God's through Christ; We belong to God through Christ; Direct attention upward.

1) What are the 'all things' & to whom do they belong? – just what it says! everything! – this includes every promised blessing and much, much more – this verse enlarges upon 'Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, Nor have entered into the heart of man The things which God has prepared for those who love Him.' (1 Corinthians 2:9 NKJV) – the rapture is one event in the *parousia* (second coming) which is but one part of God's grand plan. See also Romans 4:¹³, 8:¹⁷; Titus 2:¹¹⁻¹⁴; 1 Peter 2:⁹⁻¹⁰; Colossians 1:⁸⁻¹⁸

3. 4:¹⁻²¹ Accountability; Reasons to Abandon Proud Party Spirit
a. 4:¹⁻⁵ God Is Judge; Work of Stewards; Trust us, but no hasty decisions

¹ Let a man regard us in this manner, as servants of Christ, and stewards of the mysteries of God. ² In this case, moreover, it is required of stewards that one be found trustworthy. ³ But to me it is a very small thing that I should be examined by you, or by *any* human court; in fact, I do not even examine myself. ⁴ For I am conscious of nothing against myself, yet I am not by this acquitted; but the one who examines me is the Lord. ⁵ Therefore do not go on passing judgment before the time, *but wait* until the Lord comes who will both bring to light the things hidden in the darkness and disclose the motives of *men's* hearts; and then each man's praise will come to him from God.

i. Verse 1 – Unified servants/stewards of Christ; How to regard leaders/teachers

1) How does this contrast with the attitude in the church at Corinth? – their attitude was to exalt these men while Paul's was to humble them in accord with Jesus words, 'the last shall be first' (Matthew 19:30, 20:16, Mark 9:35, &c.)

ii. Verse 2 – Stewards must be trustworthy; A steward's qualifications

1) On what does the examination for approval of stewards depend? – their faithfulness (i.e., an inner quality, only sometimes externally discernible).

2) What is the difference between spiritual and servant status (cf., 3:15)? – a servant's status reflect the work he/she is gifted & chosen to (external); spiritual status reflects the closeness of relationship to the

Lord (internal).

iii. Verse 3 – Human judgement is irrelevant, doesn't count

1) Who are incapable of exercising such examination of a steward? – 'you' (i.e., a church), a human court (other men), or even one's own self.

iv. Verse 4 – (Only) Our Lord's judgement is relevant, counts

1) Why is "self" an inadequate examiner? – the devil's accusations, self-doubts, experiences of failure all cloud our judgement; the ongoing presence of the old man (nature, flesh) within us, we have insufficient data (1 Corinthians 13:12)

2) Why is the Lord the only qualified examiner? – He is perfect, knows all; As Creator he knows our capacity ('that we are but dust') Ps 100:3, 103:14; 139:14

v. Verse 5 – Wait for the Lord's judgements; (Patience for Spirit's leading)

1) What is the principle in passing judgement (cf., Romans 14:4)? – Hold off; Don't; We are not to judge; It is not our responsibility. The Lord is the righteous Judge making no mistakes (2 Timothy 4:8).

2) What is your personal reaction to this verse? – relief, gratitude, assurance, apprehension

b. 4:⁶⁻¹³ Applying the Apostles' Example to the Corinthians' Problem
i. 6-8 Don't Be Bigheaded; Rather Be Humble; Check out Humility

⁶ Now these things, brethren, I have figuratively applied to myself and Apollos for your sakes, that in us you might learn not to exceed what is written, in order that no one of you might become arrogant in behalf of one **against the other*. ⁷ For who regards you as superior? And what do you have that you did not receive? But if you did receive it, why do you boast as if you had not received it? ⁸ You are already filled, you have already become rich, you have become kings without us; and I would indeed that you had become kings so that we also might reign with you.
* or, 'of one over another'

1) Verse 6 – Don't be arrogant; Don't exceed your position; Paul explains what he has been saying; Avoiding arrogance.

(a) What specific things 'exceed what is written' in the letter thus far? – Their arrogance, politics, boasting. View of church unscriptural.

(b) Who are the 'one' and 'other' in this verse? – Paul & Apollos parties

2) Verse 7 – No cause for boasting; They gained nothing (by themselves).

(a) What was the result of their being puffed up in the previous verse? – They didn't learn; Boasted as if they earned it; Didn't learn trust.

3) Verse 8 – Reigning!?!? You're not there yet! You act in your own strength.

(a) What is the tone (of voice) in this verse? – Part 1: ironic, sarcastic; Part 2: encouraging, concerned, said with sadness and longing.

ii. ⁸⁻¹³ To Whom Much is Given; The Apostles' Lot; Fools for Christ's Sake
The Price of Being an Apostle; The Reprimand of the Apostles' Example

⁹ For, I think, God has exhibited us apostles last of all, as men condemned to death; because we have become a spectacle to the world, both to angels and to men. ¹⁰ We are fools for Christ's sake, but you are prudent in Christ; we are weak, but you are strong; you are distinguished, but we are without honour. ¹¹ To this present hour we are both hungry and thirsty, and are poorly clothed, and are roughly treated, and are homeless; ¹² and we toil, working with our own hands; when we are reviled, we bless; when we are persecuted, we endure; ¹³ when we are slandered, we try to conciliate; we have become as the scum of the world, the dregs of all things, *even* until now.

1) Verse 9 – Apostles' poor situation; ... lowly state; Apostles are last; Apostles put to death

(a) What fact about apostles should curtail their boasting / party spirit? – How can you boast about being last; poor; lowly; ...?

2) Verse 10 – Contrast between the apostles and the Corinthians

(a) What tone of voice is carried on here from the previous section? – irony or sarcasm (God often has to get our attention!)

3) Verse 11 – The Apostles' hardship; Their common denominator of poverty, hardships and difficulties.

4) Verse 12 – The Apostles' 'turning their cheek'; ... response of love; ... return of good for evil.

5) Verse 13 – The Apostles' dishonour, poor treatment, being misunderstood, lowly reputation; The Apostles demonstration of Jesus.

(a) What are marks of faithful stewards? – toiling, blessing, enduring; consistently following Jesus, despite the low opinion of and treatment by men.

c. ^{4:14-21} Paul's Relationship to Corinthians Church; Some Winning Arguments

i. ¹⁴⁻¹⁷ Paul, Their Father in the Lord; A Tender Correction

¹⁴ I do not write these things to shame you, but to admonish you as my beloved children. ¹⁵ For if you were to have countless tutors in Christ, yet *you would not have* many fathers; for in Christ Jesus I became your father through the gospel. ¹⁶ I exhort you therefore, be imitators of me. ¹⁷ For this reason I have sent to you Timothy, who is my beloved and faithful child in the Lord, and he will remind you of my ways which are in Christ, just as I teach everywhere in every church.

1) Verse 14 – Paul's guidance; Loving warning / correction; Paul's parental attitude towards the Corinthians

(a) What tone is now taken by Paul in writing? ... what from verse 13? – of a father teaching his children; fatherly, gentle, humble; a bit sad

2) Verse 15 – Paul their (spiritual) father; More than a tutor; Instructor and Father

(a) What special relationship to this church can Paul claim? – as a spiritual father (the one who had brought them to Jesus Christ) to converts

3) Verse 16 – "Follow my example"; (Be) Followers

4) Verse 17 – Paul's 'son' teaches Paul's 'children'; Timothy's credentials

(a) What can Timothy tell them about Paul to their benefit? – he could testify of the transformation from Saul to Paul; bear witness as to what Paul was really like (that most people would not have seen); be an example of someone who sought to imitate Paul imitating Jesus Christ

ii. ¹⁸⁻²¹ Paul's Fatherly Guidance; Paul's Future Visit; 'Iron Fist, Velvet Glove'

¹⁸ Now some have become arrogant, as though I were not coming to you. ¹⁹ But I will come to you soon, if the Lord wills, and I shall find out, not the words of those who are arrogant, but their power. ²⁰ For the kingdom of God does not consist in words, but in power. ²¹ What do you desire? Shall I come to you with a rod or with love and a spirit of gentleness?

(a) Verse 18 – Their arrogant independence; Misplaced Arrogance, Being puffed up

(i) What promotes self-promotion? – Boasting; Entitlement; Pride; Self-centeredness

(b) Verse 19 – A (not so) veiled threat; Paul's visit, D.V.; Paul will come & know their power

(c) Verse 20 – Power, not words, count; Power of Kingdom of God; Not words, but the Word

(i) How will Paul deal with these arrogant ones?

(d) Verse 21 – A solemn warning; 'Will discipline be necessary?'; Being firm.

(i) What is the tone of voice in this verse? – firm