

Let each one take heed how he builds

1 Corinthians 3 - 4

The Context

1. The immediate context is a perceived conflict between Paul and Apollos (v4).
2. Paul refutes the concept of division based on personalities (1:10 – 13, 3:5 – 10)
3. Paul seems to be generalizing the concept in 3:11 – 17, but one could still restrict the builders to those who are specifically appointed by God for that purpose.
4. That the illustration of Paul and Apollos is to be generalized is made clear in 4:6 – 16.

The Points

1. (3:5 – 6) Each servant (minister) teaches a piece and each is of value in the process of building (edification).
2. (3:6 – 7) “But God gave the increase.”
 - a. To the unbeliever, that which was given is the Word (*c.f.*, John 1:1 *et al*), which in this context was oral.
 - b. To the believer, the increase is also due to the Spirit (*e.g.*, 2 Corinthians 3:14 – 18, Romans 8:7 – 17).
 - c. This concept prevents arrogance (3:18 – 23, 4:7 – 14)
3. (3:9) Teachers are God’s fellow workers as well as servants (4:1 – 2).
4. (3:11) Jesus is the foundation, not the whole building. (*c.f.*, 1 Peter 2:4 – 10)
5. (3:12 – 13) Quality of workmanship is important.
6. (4:3 – 6) Teach what you believe.
 - a. Believing you are right does not make you right.
 - b. Avoid self-doubt, which stalls teaching. Let God straighten it out (*c.f.*, Philippians 3:15).
7. (4:15 – 21) The builders have a special relationship with the building in the long term.

Applications

1. The Family of God is a pervasive concept in the New Testament (see handout).
2. House churches (Romans 16:5, 1 Corinthians 16:19, Colossians 4:15, Philemon 2)
 - a. “Church” is applied to the worldwide body of believers, those in a geographic area, and those attached to a “house.”
 - b. Available transportation in that time would prohibit the gathering of all believers in metropolitan areas such as those to which Paul wrote.
 - c. Paul wrote as though all the believers in a city or province were aware of the larger group in that area.
 - d. “House” could refer only to those who lived in that physical home, or it could refer to the spiritual family that clustered around the named person. The latter seems more likely.
3. The “work” is to be built up, therefore the “work” should become teachers (Hebrews 5:12 – 14). James 3:1 does not teach that few should teach, but that one should be prepared for a stricter judgment (3:1), learn to control the tongue (3:2 – 12), and display wisdom and understanding through meekness and good conduct (3:13 – 18), not division (4:1 – 6). Using 3:1 to restrict the number of teachers creates a contradiction with Hebrews 5 and 1 Peter 2:5 and 9, plus leaves open the question of who should teach.

4. The illustration is building a strong and lasting structure. The literal application is to build faith.
5. The “children in the faith” concept should result in “pods” of believers surrounding those who were most instrumental in their development, although not exclusively, which is where the Corinthian Christians went wrong. The pods are closely associated with those in the same geographic region. The regional groups are closely associated through fellowship.
6. We need to constantly re-evaluate that we are using all the parts of the illustration:
 - a. We are being built up
 - b. We are being built up to a high standard of quality
 - c. We are being built up by many workmen
 - d. We are building up others
 - e. We are using quality materials
 - f. We are building up as a team of builders
 - g. We are building and being built by the power of the Word and the indwelling Spirit
 - h. We are a spiritual family of parents, children, cousins, and siblings.
 - i. We are counted faithful stewards of the mysteries of God
 - j. We are succeeding by the power of God, not by conventional wisdom.