

THE FOUNDATION IS JESUS

“For no one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ” (1 Cor. 3:11).

This verse is both simple and profound! It states emphatically that Jesus is the only foundation for unity among believers. The word “foundation”, of course, is significant. Any building without a foundation cannot stand! Thus, those who attempt to gain unity on any other foundation than Jesus are doomed to failure. Let us examine this verse more carefully!

There was only one church in Corinth. Paul wrote two inspired letters to that church. Both letters are addressed to **“the church of God in Corinth” (1 Cor. 1:2 and 2 Cor. 1:1)**. Both letters, as you know, are now in the Bible. They are Scriptures! They are inspired by God and are profitable for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness (2 Tim. 3:16). Yet, Paul’s letters, inspired though they are, are not the foundation for unity. Jesus is!

Paul was emphatic that there be no divisions in the church. He wanted them to be perfectly united in mind and thought. He had received word, however, that there was quarreling in the church. Some of them were gathering around human leaders like Paul, Apollos, and Cephas (1Cor. 1:10-12).

Among other things, their quarreling and division demonstrated their need for maturity. It indicated that they were worldly and not spiritual. Consequently Paul had to treat them like infants and feed them with milk and not solid food. One problem was that their primary allegiance was to men like Apollos or Paul and not Christ. It should never be that way (See 1 Cor. 3:1-9). Jesus should always be our priority! Jesus is the foundation, not Paul, Apollos, Cephas, or anyone else.

It is in this context that Paul, as an expert builder, laid the foundation. That foundation he laid was Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ is a good foundation for He is the same yesterday, today, and forever! (Heb. 13:8). Jesus is God’s foundation for all unity, not just in Corinth, but throughout the entire universe! According to Ephesians 1:10 the whole fragmented universe will someday be united under One Head, even Christ. Yes! We repeat! **“no one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ” (1 Cor. 3:11).**

The church of our Lord Jesus Christ is represented in the Bible in a variety of ways. Sometimes it is a kingdom, and other times it is a flock. Etc. In this passage the church is a temple. The church, of course, is composed of people. So it is people that are built like a temple upon the foundation of Christ. As Peter would later write: **“You also like living stones are being built into a spiritual house (1 Pet. 2:5)**. Paul concurred: **“Don’t you know that you yourselves are God’s temple and that God’s Spirit lives in you. If anyone destroys God’s temple, God will destroy him; for God’s temple is sacred, and you are that temple” (1 Cor. 3:16)**

Some people built upon the foundation of Christ are like gold, silver, and precious stones. Others are like wood, hay or straw. When tried by fire the wood, hay, and straw are consumed but the precious stones are not. Thus, if any of the brethren in Corinth would fall away when tried by fire, preachers like Paul would obviously suffer loss, but would themselves still be saved (1 Cor. 3:12-15).

JESUS WAS THE FOUNDATION OF UNITY AMONG THE APOSTLES

After a long night of prayer Jesus selected 12 men to be His apostles. They were: **“Simon (whom he named Peter), his brother Andrew, James, John, Philip, Bartholomew, Matthew, Thomas, James son of Alphaeus, Simon who was called the Zealot, Judas son of James, and Judas Iscariot, who became a traitor” (Lk. 6:14-16).**

These 12 men were like loose grains of sand until they followed Jesus. Even as they followed Christ, however, it was not at all uncommon for them to disagree with one another as they did the night before Calvary (Lk. 22:24-30). As long as they agreed on Jesus, however, they were still united. One dramatic difference among the apostles is illustrated by Matthew the publican, and Simon the Zealot. Matthew was a tax collector who raised money for the Romans and Simon was a political Zealot who hated Romans and tax collectors. The foundation of their unity, of course, was not politics, it was Christ! Politics is often divisive. Matthew and Simon might never have agreed on politics, but they did agree on Jesus. That’s why they were united. The same is true today. People of all political views can be part of the Family of God as long as they keep their focus on Jesus. Jesus is the foundation for our unity and like sheep converging on a shepherd, the closer we get to Jesus, the closer we get to one another.

WHOM SHALL WE FOLLOW

“Teacher,” said John, “we saw a man driving out demons in your name and we told him to stop because he was not one of us.” “Do not stop him,” Jesus said. “No one who does a miracle in my name, can in the next moment say anything bad about me, for whosoever is not against us is for us” (Mk. 9:38-40).

It is interesting to note that earlier in this chapter the apostles themselves had tried to cast out a demon out of a young boy but they failed. The father of the demon possessed boy made this clear to Jesus: **“I asked your disciples to drive out the spirit but they could not” (Mk. 9:18).**

When this stranger was successful in driving out demons, however, the disciples criticized him. Note that the man who cast out the demons did it in the “name of Jesus”. They couldn’t criticize him for this, but they did criticize him for not being one of “us”.

This was the very problem Paul confronted in Corinth. Some of the Corinthians were giving priority to human leaders like Paul, Apollos, and Cephas. That’s why they were divided. True unity comes when everyone gives the top priority to Jesus and not “us”!

Let us suppose, by way of illustration, that three missionaries arrive on an island to evangelize the natives. Each missionary is from a different denomination. There are hundreds of denominations, as you know, that all believe the Bible. Even though all three missionaries teach the Bible, don’t be surprised when their converts follow their human leaders and are divided into three different denominations.

Paul, as spiritual as he was, was offended when the disciples of Jesus selected him as their leader. He wrote: **“Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Were you baptized into the**

name of Paul? (1 Cor. 1:13). The answer was obviously no! Christ is the foundation for unity, not Paul or any other human being.

THE BIBLE IS NOT THE FOUNDATION

To say that the Bible is not the foundation for unity sounds blasphemous. As we have already said, the Bible is inspired of God and is profitable for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness. It is a lamp unto our feet and a light unto our path (Ps. 119:105). No one can possibly survive as a follower of Christ without the Bible. As Jesus Himself said: **“It is written, man shall not live by bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God” (Matt. 4:4).**

There is certainly something wrong when a believer does not want to know what God has said. Peter put it like this: **“Therefore, rid yourselves of all malice and all deceit, hypocrisy, envy and slander of every kind. Like newborn babies, crave pure spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow up in your salvation, not that you have tasted that the Lord is good” (1 Pet. 2:1-3).**

To emphasize that Christ is the foundation for unity, and not the Bible, please consider the following:

- The church began in Jerusalem on the first Pentecost after our Lord’s resurrection. It began with 3,000 converts who came from “every nation under heaven” (Acts 2:5,41). These converts were not only divided by the various languages and customs of their respective countries, they were also divided into Jewish sects such as the Pharisees, Sadducees, Herodians, etc.
- Yet all of these believers from all over the world were united. Note: **“All the believers were one in heart and mind. No one claimed that any of his possessions was his own, but they shared everything they had” (Acts 4:32).**
- The foundation for their unity was Jesus. The Pharisees and Sadducees, for example, did not suddenly agree on their doctrinal differences. Years later some of these believers still identified themselves as Pharisees (Acts 15:5). These Jewish sects, however, didn’t have to agree on the Bible as long as they agreed on Jesus. It is our agreement on Jesus that causes us to ultimately agree on the Bible. Not one word of the New Testament Scriptures, of course, was written at this time. The foundation for unity in the Jerusalem Church was Jesus.
- Neither was the church in Corinth united by the Bible. Many books of the Bible had not even been written when the Corinthians received Christ. It is thought that the last book of the Bible to be written was the book of Revelation written around A.D. 96 by John the Apostle. This was approximately 40 years after the Corinthians received Christ.
- While many congregations had portions of the Bible, no church in the world had the complete Bible for many generations. The oldest list of our 66 inspired books dates back only to the fourth century. In the twenty-first year of Emperor Constantine (A.D. 326-327), he ordered Eusebius in Caesarea to produce fifty copies of the Bible. It is thought that the Sinaitic and Vatican manuscripts were produced at that time. Not only did every “Christian” not have a Bible, as we have said, every “church” didn’t even have a Bible. There were, of course, many more than fifty congregations in the world at that time. The Bible could therefore not have possibly been the foundation for their unity, Jesus was!

- Gutenberg invented the printing press a thousand years later around A.D. 1440. The Bible was the first major work to be printed on his printing press. Yet today there are still millions of Christians who do not have a Bible. Even more significant is the fact that there are also millions of other believers who do not even have a written language. All believers must know some things from the Bible, but no one knows everything in the Bible.
- Sadly, many of those who do have Bibles have not read them. If you doubt this, please ask for a show of hands in the church where you worship. While teaching a class of freshman on a Christian College campus I asked for a show of hands to see how many of them had read the entire Bible. Only about one third had done so.
- Of those who have “read” the entire Bible, not all have “studied” the entire Bible. Of those who claim to have studied the entire Bible, if there be any such people, not one of them understands the entire Bible.
- Those who “study” the Bible invariably study under the influence of a teacher. Again, we should not be surprised when the student becomes a part of the same denomination as his teacher. THIS IS PRECISELY THE KIND OF UNITY PAUL CONDEMNED. THE FOUNDATION FOR CHRISTIAN UNITY IS NOT MARTIN LUTHER, JOHN CALVIN, OR JOHN WESLEY ANY MORE THAN IT IS PAUL, APOLLOS, OR CEPHAS!

THE CHURCH IS A FAMILY

Paul referred to the church as “God’s Household” (Eph. 2:19), and “family” (Eph. 3:15). Jacob, also known as Israel, had one of the most famous families in history. He had 12 sons and they ultimately became the nation of Israel. Please note that even though these 12 sons were in the same family and had the same father, they were still all different from one another:

- Reuben was turbulent as waters (Gen. 49:4).
- Simeon and Levi were brothers whose swords were weapons of violence (Gen. 49:5).
- Judah was like a lion’s cub (Gen. 49:9).
- Zebulun would live by the seashore and become a haven for ships (Gen. 49:13).
- Issachar was like a rawboned donkey lying down between two saddlebags (Gen. 49:14).
- Dan was like a serpent by the roadside (Gen. 49:17).
- Gad would attack a band of raiders at their heels (Gen. 49:19).
- Naphtali was like a doe set free that bore beautiful fawns (Gen. 49:21).
- Joseph was a fruitful vine near a spring whose branches climbed over a wall (Gen. 49:22).
- Benjamin was like a ravenous wolf (Gen. 49:27).
- Even though these 12 sons were all different, they were all in the same family because they all had the same father.
- Jacob and Esau were twins but were still dramatically different. Jacob had smooth skin but Esau was red and his whole body was like a hairy garment (Gen. 25:24-28). The fact that they had the same father, however, made them brothers.
- It is normal for family members to be different. Invariably, some are young and others are old. Babies need to be taught and sometime old people are too senile to be taught. This, however, does not keep them from all being in the same family. Some children are even born handicapped, but if they have the same father they are still brethren.

- When we become a Christian God is our father (Gal. 3:26). Since God is also the Father of Jesus that makes us brothers with Jesus. Jesus is not ashamed to call us brethren, no matter how weak and ignorant we are, because we all have the same Father! (Heb. 2:11,12).

TWO ADAMS

Paul reminded the Corinthians that there are two Adams (1 Cor. 15:45-49). The first Adam was a man in the Garden of Eden. He began a physical family that includes everyone on earth. Everyone in the human family can trace their physical lineage back to the first Adam. In Adam all die! The Last Adam is Jesus. He began a spiritual family. Everyone in God's spiritual family can trace their spiritual lineage back to Jesus. In Christ all will be made alive (1 Cor. 15:22).

How can we tell which children belong to Jesus? According to statistics cited by Talon Medical Limited, 7 babies out of every thousand, are either temporarily or permanently switched with other babies at birth. The solution to this problem is simple. A DNA test can determine who is a child's father. The true identity of a child is not determined by their appearance or intelligence, but by their DNA. The same is true regarding the children of God. We can be identified by our spiritual DNA. Perhaps this is what Paul referred to by using the word "image" or "likeness" to describe the difference between the children of Adam and the children of Jesus. **"And as we have borne the image of the earthy, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly" (1 Cor. 15:49 KJV).** The children of God have His "image". Those who are saved are **"born again, not of perishable seed, but of imperishable, through the living and enduring word of God" (1 Pet. 1:23).** Every seed has its own DNA and so does the "Seed" of God. When we are born again of God's Seed, we should not be surprised that we bear the likeness of God!

The word translated as "image" in 1 Corinthians 15:49 is the Greek word "eikon". It is found 23 times in the N. T. Scriptures. It is the basis of our English word "icon" which today is used to refer to an "image" on a computer screen. The Scriptures teach that Jesus is the "image" of the invisible God (Col. 1:15). How simple! How profound! When you "click" on Jesus you get God! The DNA of Jesus is the same as the DNA of God for God is His Father! Thus Jesus is the "image" of the invisible God! When we are born again God's "image" is also in us. His Seed contains His DNA] and it is passed on to us when we are born again!

John, in his first epistle, lists six characteristics of those who are born of God:

- **"If you know that he is righteous, you know that everyone who does what is right has been born of him" (1 Jn. 2:29).**
- **"No one who is born of God will continue to sin, because God's seed remains in him and he cannot go on sinning, because he has been born of God. This is how we know who the children of God are and who the children of the devil are" (1 Jn. 3:9,10).**
- **"Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. Whoever does not love does not know God for God is love" (1 Jn. 4:7,8).**
- **"Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God, and everyone who loves the father loves his child as well. This is how we know that we love the children of God: by loving God and carrying out his commands" (1 Jn. 5:1,2).**

- **“For everyone born of God overcomes the world. This is the victory that has overcome the world, even our faith” (1 Jn. 5:4).**
- **“We know that anyone born of God does not continue to sin; the one who was born of God keeps him safe, and the evil one cannot harm him. We know that we are the children of God, and that the whole world is under the control of the evil one” (1 Jn. 5:18,19).**
- **WE DEMONSTRATE THAT WE ARE THE CHILDREN OF GOD, NOT BY WHAT WE “SAY” BUT BY “WHO WE ARE” AND WHAT WE “DO”!**

THE OLD COVENANT AND THE NEW COVENANT

Our transformation into the likeness of Jesus directly involves the “new covenant”. Please consider:

“For if there had been nothing wrong with that first covenant, no place would have been sought for another. But God found fault with the people and said: The days are coming, declares the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the people of Israel and with the people of Judah. It will not be like the covenant I made with their ancestors when I took them by the hand to lead them out of Egypt, because they did not remain faithful to my covenant, and I turned away from them, declares the Lord. This is the covenant I will establish with the people of Israel after that time, declares the Lord. I will put my laws in their minds and write them on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people. No longer will they teach their neighbor, or say to one another, ‘Know the Lord,’ because they will all know me, from the least of them to the greatest. For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more.” By calling this covenant “new,” he has made the first one obsolete; and what is obsolete and outdated will soon disappear.” (Heb. 8:7-12).

THE OLD COVENANT

- The Old Covenant was the Ten Commandments. God said so! Here is what God said to Moses: **“He declared unto you his covenant, the Ten Commandments, which he commanded you to follow and then wrote them on two stone tablets” (Deut. 4:13).**
- God made this covenant with His people in the day when he took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt. That’s not when most books of the Hebrew Bible were written, but it is when the people of God received “His covenant” the “Ten Commandments”.
- After writing the Ten Commandments on two stone tablets God gave them to Moses and “added nothing more” (Deut. 5:22).
- The Ten Commandments were placed in a container called the “ark of the covenant” (Ex. 25:16).
- When the Ten Commandments were given 3,000 people died (Ex. 32:28). Paul correctly called this covenant written in stone a ministry that brought death (2 Cor. 3:7).
- God Himself found something wrong with this first covenant, that’s why He decided to write a second (Heb. 8:7).
- Abraham’s two wives and their children figuratively represent the two covenants (Gal. 4:24).
- Hagar and Ishmael represent slavery and the old covenant given at Mt. Sinai (Gal. 4:24,25).
- Ishmael created controversy and hostility (Gen. 16:11,12). The Ten Commandments also create controversy.

- Everyone of the Ten Commandments has to be interpreted. That’s why the Old Covenant was controversial. Take, for example, commandment # 4 **“Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy” (Ex. 20:8)**. Scholars have debated exactly what can be done on the Sabbath for 3,500 years and still do not agree! That’s one reason why the Old Covenant was like Ishmael.
- **“For if there had been nothing wrong with that first covenant, no place would have been sought for another” (Heb. 8:7)**

THE NEW COVENANT

- By deliberate design the New Covenant was not like the Old Covenant.
- When the Old Covenant was given, 3,000 people died. When the New Covenant was given, 3,000 people were saved! (Acts 2:41)
- The New Covenant was not written with ink nor carved into stone. It was written on the tablet of the human heart (Heb. 8:10; 2 Cor. 3:2,3).
- The Old Covenant was external. It tried to “conform” people by laws imposed from without. The New Covenant is internal and “transforms” people by laws written within (Rom. 12:2).
- The Old Covenant had to be taught to people so they could know the Lord. The New Covenant is different in that people have to be taught first before they can receive it.
- The Old Covenant, like Ishmael, came in an ordinary way. The New Covenant, like Isaac, requires a miracle (Gal. 4:23).
- The Old Covenant brings slavery, and the New Covenant brings freedom (Gal. 4:26,27).
- The Old Covenant was written by the finger of God on tablets of stone. The New Covenant is written by God on the minds and hearts of believers!
- The New Covenant transforms us so much that we become a “new creation”. **“Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!” (2 Cor. 5:17).**
- It doesn’t matter whether you are a Jew or Greek, slave or free, male or female, when you are born again you become a child of God. As a child of God you receive the DNA of God. God writes this new covenant in your mind and heart and you become a part of God’s family which is the church.

THE PRAYER OF JESUS

John 17:1-26 is the longest recorded prayer of Jesus in the Bible. He prayed this prayer on the night before Calvary. It is divided into three parts. First, Jesus prayed for Himself (vss.1-5). Second, Jesus prayed for His Disciples (vss. 6-19). Finally Jesus prayed for all believers (vss. 20-26).

Here is what Jesus prayed for all believers: **“My prayer is not for them alone. (the disciples) I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me. I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one—I in them and you in me—so that they may be brought to complete unity. Then the world will know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me. Father, I**

want those you have given me to be with me where I am, and to see my glory, the glory you have given me because you loved me before the creation of the world. Righteous Father, though the world does not know you, I know you, and they know that you have sent me. I have made you known to them, and will continue to make you known in order that the love you have for me may be in them and that I myself may be in them.” (Jn. 17:20-26).

- Please note that the unity of believers was the priority of Jesus in this prayer!
- Please also note the connection between the unity of believers and the evangelization of the world. Jesus prayed that we would “one” “that the world may believe”.
- There is obviously a connection between a divided church and millions who do not believe!
- The *World Christian Encyclopedia* (Oxford Univ Press, 2nd edition 2001) lists 33,000 “Christian” denominations. Wikipedia lists 1,100 different denominations. World Christian database lists 9,000.
- It is not necessary for us to come up with a correct number of denominations for if there are only two divisions in the Body of Christ that is one division too many!
- There is only One Body of which Christ is the Head!
- **“Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit – just as you were called – one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all” (Eph. 4:2-6).**
- **“CHRIST IN YOU THE HOPE OF GLORY. WE PROCLAIM HIM, ADMONISHING AND TEACHING EVERYONE WITH ALL WISDOM, SO THAT WE MAY PRESENT EVERY ONE PERFECT IN CHRIST. TO THIS END I LABOR, STRUGGLING WITH ALL HIS ENERGY, WHICH SO POWERFULLY WORKS IN ME (COL. 1:27-29).**
- **“FOR NO ONE CAN LAY ANY FOUNDATION OTHER THAN THE ONE ALREADY LAID, WHICH IS JESUS CHRIST” (1 COR. 3:11).**

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