

“God’s Building” (part 2)

1 Corinthians 3:10-15

In our last message on this subject we looked primarily at Ephesians 2:19-22, where Paul wrote to the church at Ephesus about what the “church building” looks like. In this text we will see more on the results of the building, and what that means for the church as a whole.

This is a very interesting text, and one that has been applied in a very narrow way by many that have preached, taught, and written on the subject. For many, this is speaking specifically and entirely about the Judgment Seat of Christ, where the children of God will be given a time to give account of what they did for the Lord, and to receive those “crowns” mentioned in Scripture as their recognition for being faithful stewards of the things of the Lord.

Romans 14:10

(10) But why dost thou judge thy brother? or why dost thou set at nought thy brother? for we shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ.

2 Corinthians 5:10

(10) For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things *done* in *his* body, according to that he hath done, whether *it be* good or bad.

Although the Bema Seat of Christ is partially in view here, that is not actually what this text is speaking to in its primary, correct interpretation. Keep in mind the entire context, both before and after this, is speaking of the church (specifically, the church in Corinth). This particular section of the greater context is looking back on that issue of God giving the increase to the labor that was begun by Paul and Apollos. This is just a further examination of that

labor, and the labor that all God-called, God-ordained pastors put forth in their work for the Lord in the ministry.

If we miss the actual point of this context we miss a wonderful truth on the church, and the labor put into it. The issue of the Judgment Seat comes up later in the writings to the church at Corinth, but it is very clear that is what that passage is dealing with. This passage, however, is dealing with more of what happens here on earth rather than what happens in heaven.

I. THE MINISTRY OF BUILDING – VS. 10

A. It is "according to the grace of God" – this is a common statement in relation to the spiritual gift that Paul had, and it demonstrates that the ability the servant of the Lord has to do what he is supposed to do is from the Lord – we are nothing without His "grace"

1 Peter 4:11

(11) If any man speak, *let him speak* as the oracles of God; if any man minister, *let him do it* as of the ability which God giveth: that God in all things may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom be praise and dominion for ever and ever. Amen.

B. If we are using our spiritual gifts properly, especially the pastor/teacher, then we will be a "wise masterbuilder" – we will be one that has used what the Lord has given to us for the furtherance of the Kingdom of God

1. The Greek word for "masterbuilder" is only found here in the New Testament
2. It is a word where our word "architect"

comes from (in fact, it is a transliterated word as "architect") – it comes from two words

- a) "Archi" (ἀρχή) – which means chief – as in archangel, archbishop, chief priest
- b) "Tekton" (τέκτων) – a craftsman in wood or stone, a carpenter or mason (RWP)

"*Architektôn* occurs in the papyri and inscriptions in an even wider sense than our use of architect, sometimes of the chief engineers. But Paul means to claim primacy as pastor of the church in Corinth as is true of every pastor who is the architect of the whole church life and work. All the workmen (*tektones*, carpenters) work under the direction of the architect" (Plato, *Statesman*, 259 – as found in RWP).

"The architect does not work himself, but is the ruler of the workmen" (Plato, "Statesman," 259 – as found in Vincent).

- 3. Paul planted the church – he "laid the foundation" – he was the chief architect in the ministry upon which Apollos came and built, and the foundation he laid had rock-solid footings and was a solid foundation

Luke 6:47-48 **Whosoever cometh to me, and heareth my sayings, and doeth them, I will shew you to whom he is like: He is like a man which built an house, and digged deep, and laid the foundation on a rock: and when the flood arose, the stream beat vehemently upon that house, and could not shake it: for it was founded upon a rock.**

C. "And another buildeth thereon" – this church has had many pastors over the years, and each one has had a responsibility of "building" on the

foundation that was laid before them. We don't need to lay another foundation – it's already laid – we just need to keep building.

D. "But let every man take heed how he buildeth thereupon"

1. "Every man" – nominative case, masculine gender, singular – speaking in this context specifically of the pastor of the church
2. "Take heed" – see to it – be cautious in how he builds, and be cautious of the dangers of those that would hinder, and even halt, the progress of the building (as the enemies of Nehemiah when he was rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem)

1 Peter 2:1-3 Wherefore laying aside all malice, and all guile, and hypocrisies, and envies, and all evil speakings, ² As newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby: ³ If so be ye have tasted that the Lord [is] gracious.

3. "Buildeth thereupon" – on the foundation already laid

II. THE MEASURE OF BUILDING – VS. 11

A. The measure, the standard by which a structurally sound "church building" is measured, is Jesus Christ – this is the most important point in all of this – if the foundation is not securely anchored in Christ then the building, no matter how large it becomes, will not stand

Ephesians 2:20 And are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner [stone];

B. "For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid"

1. He's speaking specifically of the church in Corinth, and the trouble they were having with both the Greeks within the church, and the issue of knowledge (Gnosticism), as well as the Judaizers that were instigating trouble from without the church.
2. By application, every church needs to make sure the foundation of the ministry is established on the principles of Christ – if it is, then the trouble that will inevitably come will be unable to collapse the "building" of the church.

"The ministers of Christ ought to lay no other foundation than Christ: they are to lead their people to, and build them upon, no other rock but Christ.

"All threatenings, promises, commands, duties, privileges, are to be preached and pressed with respect to Jesus Christ; he is to be laid as the only foundation in respect of knowledge, in respect of faith, in respect of justification, in respect of intercession and acceptance with God.

"The minister's great work is to set Christ forth in all his glorious fulness, to represent him in all his offices, as a glorious object for the eye of our faith to look unto, and fix upon." (William Burkett)

3. If the foundation is not solid and anchored properly, it doesn't matter what is built above it – it will not stand. Many a ministry has been built with great attention to detail, yet, because the foundation was not solid, the ministry crumbled beneath

the burdens heaped upon it.

C. "Which is Jesus Christ"

1. His work – the redemptive work on the cross

Acts 4:11-12 This is the stone which was set at nought of you builders, which is become the head of the corner. (12) Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved.

Galatians 1:7-9 Which is not another; but there be some that trouble you, and would pervert the gospel of Christ. (8) But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed. (9) As we said before, so say I now again, If any [*man*] preach any other gospel unto you than that ye have received, let him be accursed.

2. His teaching – the church is the pillar and ground of the truth (1 Tim. 3:15) – it is through the teaching ministry of the church, and of the pastor/teacher, that the foundation stands secure, and upon which the building is built

1 Timothy 3:15-16 But if I tarry long, that thou mayest know how thou oughtest to behave thyself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth. ¹⁶ And without controversy great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifest in the flesh, justified in the Spirit, seen of angels, preached unto the Gentiles, believed on in the world, received up into glory.

"The meaning is, that no true church can be

reared which does not embrace and hold the true doctrines respecting him--those which pertain to his incarnation, his Divine nature, his instructions, his example, his atonement, his resurrection, and his ascension. The reason why no true church can be established without embracing the truth as it is in Christ, is, that it is by him only that men can be saved; and where this doctrine is wanting, all is wanting that enters into the essential idea of a church. The fundamental doctrines of the Christian religion must be embraced, or a church cannot exist; and where those doctrines are denied, no association of men can be recognised as a church of God. Nor can the foundation be modified or shaped so as to suit the wishes of men. It must be laid as it is in the Scriptures; and the superstructure must be reared on that alone." (Barnes)

III. THE MATERIALS USED TO BUILD – VS. 12

A. "If any man" – this is in the masculine gender and is speaking of the pastor/teacher of the church. There are many, if not most, that view this as every believer, but to be true to the contextual interpretation of any passage of Scripture, this is narrowed specifically to the pastor/teacher.

B. "Build upon this foundation" – the foundation of the work and teachings of Christ

"He speaks of the body of truth and doctrine which different teachers may erect on the one true foundation - Jesus Christ. This body is the building...To this structure different teachers (builders) bring contributions of more or less value, represented by gold, wood, hay, etc. These are not intended to represent specific forms of truth or of error, but none of them are

to be regarded as anti-Christian, which would be inconsistent with building on the true foundation. It is plainly implied that teachers may build upon the true foundation with perishable or worthless materials. This appears in the history of the Church in the false interpretations of scripture, and the crude or fanatical preaching of sincere but ignorant men." (Vincent)

C. "Gold, silver, precious (costly) stones"

Revelation 21:18-21

(18) And the building of the wall of it was *of* jasper: and the city *was* pure gold, like unto clear glass.

(19) And the foundations of the wall of the city *were* garnished with all manner of precious stones. The first foundation *was* jasper; the second, sapphire; the third, a chalcedony; the fourth, an emerald;

(20) The fifth, sardonyx; the sixth, sardius; the seventh, chrysolite; the eighth, beryl; the ninth, a topaz; the tenth, a chrysoprasus; the eleventh, a jacinth; the twelfth, an amethyst.

(21) And the twelve gates *were* twelve pearls; every several gate was of one pearl: and the street of the city *was* pure gold, as it were transparent glass.

1. These are materials that will not be consumed when the fires of trials come – when faced with the judgment upon the works of the building, these materials will withstand – they are considered eternal in nature
2. These are the doctrines of Christ that edify, that build-up the believers, that equip them to serve the Lord

D. "Wood, hay, stubble"

1. These materials will be consumed when

the judgment fires come because they represent teachings that added nothing to the edifying of the body of Christ

2. These are doctrines, that although are not false teachings, that add no value to the building; that are there to be seen, and may look and sound good, but are of no eternal value
3. All we do, as a church, is to be done for eternal value in mind – if that goes “against the grain” of modern church culture, then so be it – I would rather stand before God and account for the “gold, silver, precious stones” than stand before Him and only have “wood, hay, stubble” to show. I would rather, when the trials of ministry come, and the “fire” of the “the day” comes, to be able to have our ministry still be standing, than to have a lot of human success and see it all burn up when it matters most.

E. One thing of note here – the divisions caused in the church, the choosing of one leader over another, was caused, in part, because of the improper building upon the foundation laid in Jesus Christ. When a church follows a man, and when that man puts himself in improper view, the building will be made of the wrong type of material – the “wood, hay, stubble.

IV. THE MANIFESTATION OF THE BUILDING – VS. 13-15

A. The materials used, and the results of them are what is manifested

B. Vs. 13 – no matter what type of “building” we have erected on the firm foundation of Christ, it will be brought to light – it will be found out – during the times of fiery trials it faces. The only ones that will remain faithful and stay true to the doctrines of the Word of God are those that have built a solid building out of the right materials.

1. “Every man’s work” – again, speaking specifically of the pastor/teacher
2. “Shall be made” – at some time in the future
3. “Manifest” – from a word that means to shine – will be made apparent and plain
4. “The day”
 - a) Much has been written on this word and many consider this to be the Judgment Seat of Christ – in fact, there are some translations that have (incorrectly) added the words “of the Lord” to this to show that is referring to a future judgment time after this age is over
 - b) If this meant the Judgment Seat of Christ then the text would clearly demonstrate that, not to mention that it would be clearly stated as that. The “Day of the Lord” throughout Scripture is not referring to the judgment of believers but is referencing the judgment upon either (or both) Israel and/or the Gentile nations at the end of the Tribulation. The preponderance of evidence demonstrates this. It is a dangerous thing to build a doctrine on an “outlier” text rather than on the overwhelming evidence of Scripture.

- c) This "day" is a day in the future of every pastor's ministry that will be a point where what has been built, as a church, will come to light and will be seen for what it truly is – whether sound or weak.
5. "Shall declare it" – it will be revealed, brought to light
6. "Because it shall be revealed by fire"
- a) This is in the present, indicative, passive tense – "it is being revealed in the fire"
 - b) Some see this as the judgment of God in heaven – but it is not likely that
 - c) Some see this as the destruction of Jerusalem in 70AD – there may be a case to be made for this but, taking it in the context of the letter to the Corinthians, it's not likely that is the case either
 - d) The most likely interpretation for this, staying with the contextual, and historical interpretation, is that it is referring to the revealing, and, at times, cleansing fire of trials that we will face – 1 Pet. 1:7; 4:12-19

1 Peter 1:7

(7) That the trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honour and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ:

1 Peter 4:12-19

(12) Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you:

(13) But rejoice, inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ's sufferings; that, when his glory shall be revealed, ye may be glad also with exceeding joy.

(14) If ye be reproached for the name of Christ, happy *are ye*; for the spirit of glory and of God resteth upon you: on their part he is evil spoken of, but on your part he is glorified.

(15) But let none of you suffer as a murderer, or *as* a thief, or *as* an evildoer, or as a busybody in other men's matters.

(16) Yet if *any man suffer* as a Christian, let him not be ashamed; but let him glorify God on this behalf.

(17) For the time *is come* that judgment must begin at the house of God: and if *it* first *begin* at us, what shall the end *be* of them that obey not the gospel of God?

(18) And if the righteous scarcely be saved, where shall the ungodly and the sinner appear?

(19) Wherefore let them that suffer according to the will of God commit the keeping of their souls *to him* in well doing, as unto a faithful Creator.

7. "And the fire shall try every man's work of what sort it is" – there is work involved in building (edifying) the church of God, and it is that work that will be made clear in the "fire" we will face
8. One of the earliest commentaries available still today on this text – the Geneva Bible from 1599 – says this on this text:

He testifies, as indeed it truly is, that all are not good builders, not even all of those who stand upon this one and only foundation. However, this work of evil builders, he says, stands for a season, yet it will not always

deceive, because the light of the truth appearing at length, as day, will dissolve this darkness, and show what it is. And as that stuff is tried by the fire, whether it is good or not, so will God in his time, by the touch of his Spirit and word, try all buildings, and so will it come to pass, that those which are found pure and sound, will still continue so, to the praise of the workmen. But they that are otherwise will be consumed and vanish away, and so will the workman be frustrated of the hope of his labour, who pleased himself in a thing of nothing.

C. Vs. 14 – when the revealing fire has done its work, if there is anything remaining (if the ministry he has built is still holding true to the doctrines of the Word of God) then he shall receive a “reward”

1. The initial reward would be here on earth, in eternal fruit from his labor
2. The final reward will be to hear the Master say, “Well done, good and faithful servant” (Matt. 25)

D. Vs. 15 – if there is nothing remaining then he will suffer the loss of what he thought was value in his labor, but he will, in no case, lose his salvation – that is already eternally settled.

1. The Catholic church uses this text to justify their teaching on “purgatory,” saying that our faith is going to be tried in the fires of purgatory and only those that have anything good left will make it out of purgatory (that’s a very simplistic explanation of this doctrine)
2. The fire here is not the fires of

condemnation, or hell, but rather the aforementioned trials that the one building will go through and is simply referring to those "fiery trials" that he has come through. He may suffer loss because of the fire but it is those very same fires that show he has what is most important – an eternal salvation.

Conclusion: This ministry of building is not possible without everyone involved. The pastor cannot do it alone – he is not supposed to do it alone. If the foundation is laid properly, upon the work and teaching of Jesus (He not only being the foundation, but being the measure by which it is built), then all that is done to build upon that foundation must be done with the end result in mind – the growth of the church to advance the cause of Christ around the world as we build His Kingdom. Again – all our efforts are needed.

As we work together towards that end, what will our "church building," what will "God's building" look like both when the trials come as well as when we stand before the Lord to account for our work here? What materials are we using with which to build? What do others see – how are we manifesting that building to other?