

## 1 COR 3:10-15—BUILDING THE CHURCH

**INTRO:** Today's passage of Scripture, **1 Cor 3:10-15**, is coming at a very momentous time in the life of Community Church. We are in the process of determining God's direction for us to be a more intentional church, more engaged with the community. Last week the two groups—the inside group that has been evaluating our strengths and weaknesses as a body and the outside group that has been looking at the opportunities our community presents us with—gave their reports, and we talked about the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats we face.

Today's passage is dealing with that same subject, namely, building the church or, to put it another way, doing church the way God wants us to do church, both as individuals and corporately. We should keep this passage in mind as we come to determine God's direction for us next month, because what Paul says here is relevant for us as a church. And what he says here is also relevant for us individually, since in one way or another, every Christian, all the time, in all that we do, is building the church—either wisely or foolishly; well or poorly.

Just some very brief background before I read the passage: In **Acts 18** Paul founded the church at Corinth during his 2<sup>nd</sup> missionary journey. He stayed in Corinth for 1½ years teaching the word of God. Then he was in Ephesus for 2-3 years. But according to **1 Cor 1:11** he heard that there were various problems in the church of Corinth, so he wrote 1 Corinthians to address those problems.

At the beginning of 1 Cor 3 Paul describes the church as "God's field," and talks about how he planted and Apollos watered. But in **v.9** he also calls the church "God's building." And that is the metaphor he uses for the church in **vv.10-17**. So let's see what he says about this building—and specifically about how we build the church—in **vv.10-15 [READ VV.10-15]**.

**PROP:** Paul is telling us: We are all workers constructing a building, and the owner of the building is going to evaluate our work, for better or for worse.

**O/S:** (1) **vv.10-11** focus on the foundation; (2) **vv.12-15** focus on what we build on the foundation—and it is that which will come into judgment.

### **I. The foundation**

The foundation is Jesus Christ. Paul says that explicitly in **v.11**. The foundation is the most important part of any building, or really of anything else. For example, when I am in East Africa and teaching 1 Timothy, I always spend more time on the first 5 verses of ch. 1 because they are the foundation—everything else flows from those five verses. Vince Lombardi knew the importance of foundations. You may know the story that once in a team meeting after the Packers had lost a game, Lombardi began the meeting by going back to the foundation. He picked up a football and said, "Gentlemen, this is a football." To which Max McGee replied, "Hold on coach, you're going too fast."

In **Matt 7** Jesus used the example of two houses built on different foundations [READ **Matt 7:24-27**]. Christ himself is the foundation. But notice: in Jesus' example it is how we act—how we live our lives—once we have heard the Word of God that is the difference between building our house on the rock or on the sand. IOW, the building itself and the foundation are intimately related. The building must conform to the foundation. The building has to be lined up perfectly with the foundation or it will be unstable and will fall. That is why **v. 10** of our passage today says, "**Each man must be careful how he builds on it.**"

To put it another way, we need to be careful how we live our lives. If our actions do not conform to Jesus Christ, to what he says, to how he thinks, to his values, to how he tells us how to live, then we really don't understand Jesus in the first place. We may say that he is our Lord, but he really isn't—something else is our true, functional Lord.

This leads us to **vv. 12-15** and the issue of what we build on the foundation or how we live our lives.

### **II. What we build on the foundation**

In these verses Paul talks about everything we do as being either "**gold, silver, and precious stones**" or "**wood, hay, or straw.**" And he says that the *quality* of what we do will be obvious because it will be revealed by *fire*. Paul's point is, I think, very clear: What we do—how we live our lives—may be valuable and lasting, or we may be wasting our lives, having as our priorities things that will not last. The truth of the value or lack of value of our lives will be revealed at the Judgment. And it is the *Judgment* that Paul emphasizes again and again.

Notice: **v. 13** refers to "The Day." That is referring to the Day of Judgment. In fact, "the Day" or "that Day" or similar expressions are found more than 30 times in the NT and always refer to the Day of Judgment.

Likewise, **v. 13** says that each person's work will be **"revealed with fire,"** and **"the fire will test the quality of each man's work."** Then **v. 15** talks about a person's work being **"burned up"** but the person himself being saved **"as through fire."** In both the OT and the NT fire repeatedly signifies God's judgment. What he is getting at is that the fire of judgment will purify those good works of **"gold, silver, and precious stones"** but it will burn up our valueless works of **"wood, hay, and straw."**

The theme of judgment is reinforced again in vv. 14 and 15 which talk about people receiving rewards or suffering loss. What we do in this life is more important than we realize. The reason is that everything we do in this life has everlasting consequences, either for good or for bad. We can't see this, but we need to keep this in the forefront of our mind.

What Paul is saying is that not only does our life here and now determine where we will spend our eternity—either on the new earth or in the lake of fire—but what we do in this life determines how we will spend our eternity. We know that in the new heaven and new earth there will be no sorrow or envy or anything evil. And yet the Bible talks about some receiving rewards and some suffering loss based on how we live now. So there will be a difference between people. What will this look like? How can this be if everyone is perfectly happy on the new earth? I don't know. One person described it like this: **[GLASS AND FLASK EXAMPLE]**

What Paul is doing is very important. He is trying to burn into the forefront of our minds (so to speak) that we need to have an eternal perspective on things; that there *will* be a final judgment of our lives; our *entire* lives are going to be reviewed at that judgment, and we will receive rewards that will last forever or suffer loss that will last forever—and all that is based on what we do NOW.

This is all in keeping with a prominent biblical theme that God judges people and nations and repays them "according to their deeds." I count over 60 times in the OT and NT where God judges people *"according to their deeds."* This does not mean that we can earn our salvation by doing enough "good deeds." We cannot do that, because our hearts naturally are corrupt and inclined away from God. But it does mean that what we do now—how we live—is the outward and visible sign of our inward and spiritual state. Or, as Martin Luther put it, **"We are saved by faith alone, but the faith that saves is never alone."** IOW, real saving faith changes us from the inside-out: it changes how we think, changes our values and priorities, changes how we act and how we relate to people. Real saving faith is designed to change us—slowly by slowly—so that we become more and more like Jesus Christ himself.

If we get the reality of the judgment constantly in front of us, it should make a difference in how we live our lives. I would like to look at this in two ways: our lives individually; and our lives corporately.

### **A. Individually**

**Eph 2:10** tells us that we have been **"created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them."** **Phil 2:12-13** tell us to **"work out your salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure.** Both of those passages are consistent with what Paul has been telling us in **1 Cor 3** and what Jesus said in **Matt 7**.

So what are the "good works," the "gold, silver, and precious stones" that we are to do? When we put all of these passages together, I think we are pointed toward the answer. **Eph 2** tells us that God himself has prepared the works for us to do beforehand. **1 Cor 3** tells us that the foundation is Christ. **Matt 7** told us that our works are to be consistent with what Christ has said in his Word. And **Phil 2** tells us that God is working in and through us.

Our works of gold, silver, and precious stones, it seems to me, can only be the work of the Holy Spirit in us and through us—IOW, the things we do when our will and His will in perfect alignment—just as a building needs to be perfectly aligned with the foundation.

I think we can know when this is happening. We will know we are doing the works God has ordained for us—we will know that we are on the right foundation and that the HS is working through us—when we see the fruit of the Spirit becoming manifest in our lives and our actions. **Gal 5:22-23** tells us that **"the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control."**

The "fruit" is singular, not plural. This means they all grow up together; they are part of the same package. And note: they are all relational. To love, you need someone to love; joy comes only through others; peace occurs when all relationships are harmonious; longsuffering by its very nature is relational and indicates our response in tough situations; kindness and goodness only occur in relation to others; faithfulness is only tested by our response to others; gentleness can only be exhibited to others; and self-control is demonstrated in our response to others.

Other people are both the test and the source of all of these things. Other people are the means God uses to develop and grow the fruit of the Spirit in our lives. And this all goes back to Paul's emphasis on the judgment in **1 Cor 3**. The reason is that how we treat people in this life will be a primary basis for our final

judgment, both for reward and loss, because that reveals the true state our heart and our real relationship with Jesus.

Jesus himself made this crystal clear in **Matt 25** when he discusses the judgment and compares it to the sheep and the goats [EXPLAIN].

How this plays out in our lives individually will differ, because we are all different and our circumstances are all different. But we all need to keep in mind that *people and relationships are primary*. God may be bringing to your mind right now someone you need to forgive—or someone you need to ask for forgiveness—or someone who has a material need that you have the ability to help—or someone you need to re-establish communication with—or someone you need to mentor. The list is virtually endless. But if God is speaking to you, do something about it. Do something about it this week if not today.

Two weeks ago I received an email from Obed Magoko, one of the pastors I work with in Kenya. Here's what he said: **“Today in church I had a meeting with one of my elders, bro. John. Yesterday in Church I was teaching on Forgiveness and Reconciliation from the [ECLEA] Manual. Bro. John came to me immediately after the teachings and asked me to allow him the manual; he bought a copy. Today he asked for a meeting and he said that he has been absent from Church since his daughter was impregnated by a young man from Church, and when he followed the issue the boy's parents became defensive, forcing him to technically withdraw from Church. He says yesterday during the Teachings, he was able to Forgive. He went home and applied the REACH model [the model of how to forgive in our ECLEA manual], and for the first time in 5 months he was able to pray and sleep the night through.”**

That is a man who is taking these things seriously—in a very tough situation. He is applying in his own life the things Jesus said. He is demonstrating what Christianity is designed to be. He is building on the good foundation instead of building his life on the sand of anger and bitterness over what happened to his daughter. The HS worked in him and through him and gave him the ability to forgive; now he can sleep at night.

## **B. Our corporate life as a church**

Today's passage directly implicates our corporate life as a church. We see that biblically in that **1 Cor 3:10-12** talk about a “foundation,” and then building on it with **“gold, silver, precious stones.”** The only other place in Scripture where a “foundation” of a building is laid and “gold,” “silver,” and “precious stones” are “built” upon it is Solomon's Temple, as described in **1 Kgs 5-6; 1 Chron 29**. The NT tells us that the institutions of OT Israel—the priesthood, the sacrifices, and the temple—were what are called “types” and “shadows.” IOW, they were physical pictures that were pointing forward to spiritual truths that are fulfilled in Christ and the church.

The NT also tells us on several occasions that that church is the new, true Temple of God. We are God's building. That's what Paul is saying in today's passage. He calls us God's building in **v. 9**. In **vv. 16-17** he goes on to say [READ]. The “you” in both verses is plural, not singular. Paul is talking about the church.

In **Eph 2:20-22** he uses the same words—“build,” “foundation”—in describing the church as a living temple. He says that we are **“built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the corner stone, in whom the whole building, being fitted together, is growing into a holy temple in the Lord, in whom you also are being built together into a dwelling of God in the Spirit.”**

So what is this telling us? It seems to me it is telling us that we as a local church—we as a corporate body—should be acting consistent with how we act as individuals. The HS should be working in us and through us corporately just as He is doing individually.

As a corporate body, we have the resources and opportunities to do things that none of us can do as individuals. That is what we are in the process of investigating and evaluating as a church.

Remember: Paul was writing 1 Corinthians to deal with some serious problems in a local church. So just as the church in Corinth needed to evaluate itself, we need to ask ourselves: *How are we doing as a body?* Let me mention briefly 3 aspects of this question to help us think about how we are doing as a body:

First, how are we doing *gathering together as a body*? IOW, how active and involved are we with the body? Remember: in **Eph 2** Paul talked about how we are being **“fitted together”** and **“built together into a dwelling of God.”** For example, on Mother's Day there were a lot of people here; today, not so many. Do we come out for the eat-and-prayer nights, life groups, men's events, women's events, etc., etc. I myself do OK in some of these areas and not OK in others. Ultimately, it is a matter of how big a priority is this body in our lives. This is important because a body is only healthy and growing if all of its parts are active and engaged.

Second, what kind of *relationships do we have with each other*? No one has the time or inclination to get together with everyone, but there are a lot of interesting people in this body. You might consider inviting a new person or couple to dinner or doing something else to try to develop relationships with some new people or people you don't know well in the body. People take time, and we all have limited time. But these are our

brothers and sisters who we will be with forever. So it's probably worth spending a little time, and who knows what rewards God will have for your life if you do.

Third, what about our engagement as a body *with others*? That is what we will be coming to a decision about in a month or so. I don't know what that decision will be, but whatever it is we as individuals need to commit ourselves to active involvement in what we as a body decide to do.

There's a part of me that says, "I'm already doing enough, and I don't want to do anything else." But we are building church; *we are the public face of Jesus*. We want to become like Jesus individually and corporately. I think that God is clearly leading this body into new engagement with the community—so we need to get onboard with what God is doing. I think that when we do, we will be surprised at what God does in *us* as well as what he does *through* us in the community.

**CONCL:** Paul is telling us to act—to live—consistent with the life and teaching of Jesus. And he's telling us that what we do is far more important than most of us realize. It's far more important because everything we do now will have everlasting—eternal—consequences, either for good or not. We can't see that with our physical eyes. But that's the teaching of the Bible. And if we put this perspective at the forefront of our mind, it will affect how we live now, both individually and as a church. The end result, by God's grace, is that people will see something of Jesus when they see us.