

Welcome To The Bema Seat . . . Part 1!

Our Text: **1 Corinthians 3:10–17** *According to the grace of God which was given to me, as a wise master builder I have laid the foundation, and another builds on it. But let each one take heed how he builds on it. For no other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. Now if anyone builds on this foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw, each one's work will become clear; for the Day will declare it, because it will be revealed by fire; and the fire will test each one's work, of what sort it is. If anyone's work which he has built on it endures, he will receive a reward. If anyone's work is burned, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire.*

Do you not know that you are the temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you? If anyone defiles the temple of God, God will destroy him. For the temple of God is holy, which temple you are.

In these couple of paragraphs Paul dives into the topic of the second coming of Jesus. *Why?*

If we remember, we just finished talking about a persons actions and whether they are spiritually mature or not . . . **Well, OUR BEHAVIOR AFFECTS OUR REWARDS!!!**

But there is a paradox within these rewards:

- They are guaranteed to all of us as believers even though we are all undeserving.
- But we are also each rewarded individually and so every reward will be unique.

Let there be no mistake about it, Jesus is coming again to judge all people and He will reward His own and punish those who are not His own:

Matthew 25:20-46 *“So he who had received five talents came and brought five other talents, saying, ‘Lord, you delivered to me five talents; look, I have gained five more talents besides them.’ His lord said to him, “Well done, good and faithful servant; you were faithful over a few things, I will make you ruler over many things. Enter into the joy of your lord.’ He also who had received two talents came and said, “Lord, you delivered to me two talents; look, I have gained two more talents besides them.’ His lord said to him, “Well done, good and faithful servant; you have been faithful over a few things, I will make you ruler over many things. Enter into the joy of your lord.’*

“Then he who had received the one talent came and said, ‘Lord, I knew you to be a hard man, reaping where you have not sown, and gathering where you have not scattered seed. And I was afraid, and went and hid your talent in the ground. Look, there you have what is yours.’

“But his lord answered and said to him, ‘You wicked and lazy servant, you knew that I reap where I have not sown, and gather where I have not scattered seed. So you ought to have deposited my money with the bankers, and at my coming I would have received back my own with interest. So take the talent from him, and give it to him who has ten talents.

“For to everyone who has, more will be given, and he will have abundance; but from him who does not have, even what he has will be taken away. And cast the unprofitable servant into the outer darkness. There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.’

“When the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the holy angels with Him, then He will sit on the throne of His glory. All the nations will be gathered before Him, and He will separate them one from another, as a shepherd divides his sheep from the goats. And He will set the

sheep on His right hand, but the goats on the left. Then the King will say to those on His right hand, "Come, you blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world: for I was hungry and you gave Me food; I was thirsty and you gave Me drink; I was a stranger and you took Me in; I was naked and you clothed Me; I was sick and you visited Me; I was in prison and you came to Me."

"Then the righteous will answer Him, saying, 'Lord, when did we see You hungry and feed You, or thirsty and give You drink? When did we see You a stranger and take You in, or naked and clothe You? Or when did we see You sick, or in prison, and come to You?' And the King will answer and say to them, "Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did it to one of the least of these My brethren, you did it to Me."

"Then He will also say to those on the left hand, 'Depart from Me, you cursed, into the everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels: for I was hungry and you gave Me no food; I was thirsty and you gave Me no drink; I was a stranger and you did not take Me in, naked and you did not clothe Me, sick and in prison and you did not visit Me.'

"Then they also will answer Him, saying, 'Lord, when did we see You hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not minister to You?' Then He will answer them, saying, "Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to Me.'" And these will go away into everlasting punishment, but the righteous into eternal life."

Knowing this truth was one of Paul's greatest motivations. In a sense, everything the apostle did was motivated by this truth. His objective, within the supreme objective of glorifying his God and Savior!

Philippians 3:13-14 *Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended; but one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead, I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.*

Paul wasn't wanting glory or honor for himself, or wanting to prove himself better than other Christians, showing them up in Christian service . . . **Rather he wanted the Lord's highest reward because that would be the most pleasing to the Lord Himself, and would most graphically demonstrate his grateful love to Jesus!**

In his second letter to Corinth, Paul mentions three specific motivations he had for doing his best for Christ:

First, he wanted to please his Lord:

2 Corinthians 5:9 *Therefore we make it our aim, whether present or absent, to be well pleasing to Him.*

Second, Christ's great love controlled everything he did and his whole ministry was directed by his love of God:

2 Corinthians 5:14 *For the love of Christ compels us, because we judge thus: that if One died for all, then all died;*

And third, he knew that Christ's work was complete, that "He died for all", and that therefore the ministry of the gospel would *always* be effective and it could not fail:

2 Corinthians 5:15 *and He died for all, that those who live should live no longer for themselves, but for Him who died for them and rose again.*

We also know that Paul was not one to do things halfway. When he ran a race or fought a fight, he did so to win — to win the imperishable wreath of His Lord’s reward: ***1 Corinthians 9:24–27*** *Do you not know that those who run in a race all run, but one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you may obtain it. And everyone who competes for the prize is temperate in all things. Now they do it to obtain a perishable crown, but we for an imperishable crown. Therefore I run thus: not with uncertainty. Thus I fight: not as one who beats the air. But I discipline my body and bring it into subjection, lest, when I have preached to others, I myself should become disqualified.*

Once again, he was not competing with other believers, but against his own weakness, weariness, and sin.

This should be our heart and determination as well . . . **REMEMBER, JESUS IS COMING BACK!!!**

Revelation 22:12 *“And behold, I am coming quickly, and My reward is with Me, to give to every one according to his work.”*

So what Paul is talking about here is the reality the Jesus will judge, and reward, every believer. Also, Paul was not talking about our judging works or about God’s judging sin.

The “***judgment seat***” before which all believers will one day stand is the Greek *bema*, a tribunal:

Romans 14:10-12 *But why do you judge your brother? Or why do you show contempt for your brother? For we shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ. For it is written: “As I live, says the LORD, Every knee shall bow to Me, And every tongue shall confess to God.”*

So then each of us shall give account of himself to God.

2 Corinthians 5:10 *For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things done in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad.*

But notice that both of these passages make it clear that the judgment at that place and that time will not be to dispense condemnation for sin but reward for good works, and that it involves only believers!

Jesus judged sin on the cross, and because we stand in Him we will never be condemned for our sins!

He was condemned for us:

1 Corinthians 15:3 *For I delivered to you first of all that which I also received: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures,*

Galatians 1:4 *who gave Himself for our sins, that He might deliver us from this present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father,*

1 Peter 2:24 *who Himself bore our sins in His own body on the tree, that we, having died to sins, might live for righteousness—by whose stripes you were healed.*

He took the penalty of all our sins upon Himself:

Colossians 2:13 *And you, being dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He has made alive together with Him, having forgiven you all trespasses,*
1 John 2:12 *I write to you, little children, Because your sins are forgiven you for His name's sake.*

- **God has no more charges against us who trust in His Son, Jesus!**
- **We are His elect!**
- **He will allow no one else to bring charges against us!**

Romans 8:31–34 *What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things? Who shall bring a charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. Who is he who condemns? It is Christ who died, and furthermore is also risen, who is even at the right hand of God, who also makes intercession for us.*

Romans 8:1 *There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit.*

This is why here, in 1 Corinthians 3:10–17, Paul changes the analogy from agriculture to architecture. He had been speaking of his own planting, of Apollos's watering, and of God's giving the growth (*verses 6–8*). At the end of verse 9 he makes a transition in his metaphors: ***“You are God's field, you are God's building.”***

Using the figure of a building, Paul discusses five aspects of the work of the Lord's people on earth: the master builder, the foundation, the materials, the test, and the workmen.

Let's tackle the first two tonight . . .

Paul Was The Master Builder!

1 Corinthians 3:10 *According to the grace of God which was given to me, as a wise master builder I have laid the foundation, and another builds on it. But let each one take heed how he builds on it.*

Paul himself was the ***“master builder”*** of the ***“Corinthian project”***.

Master Builder = **ἀρχιτέκτων** *architektōn* = *Architect*. *Person responsible for the construction of a building.*

“Master builder” is one word in the Greek . . . But the word in Paul's day carried the idea of builder as well as designer. It would be like he was a combination of the **architect** and the **general contractor**.

Let's face it, as an apostle, Paul's specialty was laying foundations . . . Over the years since his conversion, Paul had been used by the Lord to establish and instruct many churches across Asia Minor and in Macedonia and Greece.

But lest some think he was bragging, he made it very clear that his calling and his effectiveness were only by **“the grace of God that was given to him”**. In other words, it was all part of God’s design for Paul that he was good, **“wise builder”**, and it wasn’t something he strove for on his own. After all, he already declared:

He had already declared that:

1 Corinthians 3:7 So then neither he who plants is anything, nor he who waters, but God who gives the increase.

A few years later he would tell the believers in Rome:

Romans 15:18 For I will not dare to speak of any of those things which Christ has not accomplished through me, in word and deed, to make the Gentiles obedient—

And he would emphasize this again to the church of Corinth at the close of this letter:

1 Corinthians 15:10 But by the grace of God I am what I am, and His grace toward me was not in vain; but I labored more abundantly than they all, yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me.

In the 18 months he had worked among the Corinthians he had faithfully preached and taught the gospel and did not teach anything else:

1 Corinthians 2:2 For I determined not to know anything among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified.

But not only did God gift him with this ability, he also showed himself **“wise”**:

Wise = σοφός *sophos* = Learned. Intelligent. Shrewd.

In other words, **“wise”** in this context has to do not only with spiritual wisdom but also with practical wisdom, with skill.

- Paul knew why he had been sent to Corinth.
- He was sent to build the foundation of the church there.
- That is what he carefully and skillfully did.
- He had the right motive.
- He had the right message.
- And he moved in the right power.

But Paul also used strategy:

- Paul went to the synagogue to preach first, because the gospel is first of all for the Jews.
- He also knew that the Jews would listen to him as one of themselves, and that those who were converted could help him reach the Gentiles.
- Therefore, the Jews were his best open door.
- Only **AFTER** winning converts in the synagogue, and often being thrown out, he would begin preaching and ministering among the Gentiles in the community:

Acts 17:1–4 Now when they had passed through Amphipolis and Apollonia, they came to Thessalonica, where there was a synagogue of the Jews. Then Paul, as his custom was, went in to them, and for three Sabbaths reasoned with them from the Scriptures, explaining and demonstrating that the Christ had to suffer and rise again from the dead, and saying, “This Jesus whom I preach to you is the Christ.” And some of them were persuaded; and a great multitude of the devout Greeks, and not a few of the leading women, joined Paul and Silas. ***Acts 18:4–7*** And he reasoned in the synagogue every Sabbath, and persuaded both Jews and Greeks.

When Silas and Timothy had come from Macedonia, Paul was compelled by the Spirit, and testified to the Jews that Jesus is the Christ. But when they opposed him and blasphemed, he shook his garments and said to them, “Your blood be upon your own heads; I am clean. From now on I will go to the Gentiles.” And he departed from there and entered the house of a certain man named Justus, one who worshiped God, whose house was next door to the synagogue.

Plainly said, Paul took his gift from God and then he **CAREFULLY** and **DILIGENTLY PLANNED** and laid a solid foundation . . . **AND THESE FOOTINGS WOULD GO DEEP AND LAST!!!**

But, the foundation is only the first part of the building process . . .

- True, Paul’s task was to lay the proper foundation of the gospel, to establish the doctrines and principles for belief and practice revealed to him by God.
- But after he left, **another began building upon it!**
- In the case of Ephesus, that person was Timothy.
- In the case of Corinth, it was Apollos.
- Paul was not jealous of those who followed him in ministry.
- He knew that, as one who laid foundations, he would have to be followed by other builders.
- Most of the Corinthians, for example, had been baptized by later pastors.
- Paul was glad for that, because it gave less excuse for the Corinthians to develop earthly loyalties to him:

1 Corinthians 1:14–15 I thank God that I baptized none of you except Crispus and Gaius, lest anyone should say that I had baptized in my own name.

But let’s also be honest and note that he was quite concerned that those who built upon the foundation he had laid would work as faithfully and well as he had worked! **“Let each man be careful how he builds upon it.”**

- **“Each man”** primarily refers to evangelists, pastors, and teachers, who have continued to build on the foundation laid by the apostles.
- These are given special and the most direct responsibility for teaching Christian doctrine.
- Paul later instructs Timothy that men who build should be faithful and capable:

2 Timothy 2:2 And the things that you have heard from me among many witnesses, commit these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also.

But the context makes it clear that a broader and more inclusive application is also in mind. The numerous references to “*each man*” and “*any man*” indicate that the principle applies to every believer!

- All of us, by what we say and do, to some extent teach the gospel.
- No Christian has the right to be careless in representing the Lord and His Word.
- Every believer is to be a careful builder.
- We all have the same responsibility.

Let’s wrap this up . . .

Jesus Christ Is The Foundation!

1 Corinthians 3:11 *For no other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ.*

Although Paul was a master builder whose primary task, as an apostle, was to lay the foundation of the Christian gospel . . . **HE DID NOT DESIGN THE FOUNDATION . . . HE ONLY LAID IT!!!**

THE ONLY FOUNDATION OF BIBLICAL CHRISTIANITY IS JESUS CHRIST HIMSELF!!!

- The foundation is not New Testament ethics, many of which are found in other religions.
- Nor is it in the history, traditions, and decisions of churches and church leaders through the centuries.
- **IT IS JESUS AND HIM ALONE!!!**

Some builders have tried to make the foundation of Christianity to be church tradition.
Others, the moral teachings of the human Jesus.
Others, ethical humanism.
Still others, some form of pseudo-scientism or simply sentimental love and good works.

**BUT THE ONLY FOUNDATION THE CHURCH CAN HAVE IS JESUS!!!
WITHOUT HIM, NO CHURCH WILL BE OF GOD AND IT WILL NOT SAVE ANYONE!!!**

Acts 3:1-4:12 *Now Peter and John went up together to the temple at the hour of prayer, the ninth hour. And a certain man lame from his mother’s womb was carried, whom they laid daily at the gate of the temple which is called Beautiful, to ask alms from those who entered the temple; who, seeing Peter and John about to go into the temple, asked for alms. And fixing his eyes on him, with John, Peter said, “Look at us.” So he gave them his attention, expecting to receive something from them. Then Peter said, “Silver and gold I do not have, but what I do have I give you: In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk.” And he took him by the right hand and lifted him up, and immediately his feet and ankle bones received strength. So he, leaping up, stood and walked and entered the temple with them—walking, leaping, and praising God. And all the people saw him walking and praising God. Then they*

knew that it was he who sat begging alms at the Beautiful Gate of the temple; and they were filled with wonder and amazement at what had happened to him.

Now as the lame man who was healed held on to Peter and John, all the people ran together to them in the porch which is called Solomon's, greatly amazed. So when Peter saw it, he responded to the people: "Men of Israel, why do you marvel at this? Or why look so intently at us, as though by our own power or godliness we had made this man walk? The God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the God of our fathers, glorified His Servant Jesus, whom you delivered up and denied in the presence of Pilate, when he was determined to let Him go. But you denied the Holy One and the Just, and asked for a murderer to be granted to you, and killed the Prince of life, whom God raised from the dead, of which we are witnesses. And His name, through faith in His name, has made this man strong, whom you see and know. Yes, the faith which comes through Him has given him this perfect soundness in the presence of you all.

"Yet now, brethren, I know that you did it in ignorance, as did also your rulers. But those things which God foretold by the mouth of all His prophets, that the Christ would suffer, He has thus fulfilled. Repent therefore and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, so that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord, and that He may send Jesus Christ, who was preached to you before, whom heaven must receive until the times of restoration of all things, which God has spoken by the mouth of all His holy prophets since the world began. For Moses truly said to the fathers, "The LORD your God will raise up for you a Prophet like me from your brethren. Him you shall hear in all things, whatever He says to you. And it shall be that every soul who will not hear that Prophet shall be utterly destroyed from among the people.' Yes, and all the prophets, from Samuel and those who follow, as many as have spoken, have also foretold these days. You are sons of the prophets, and of the covenant which God made with our fathers, saying to Abraham, "And in your seed all the families of the earth shall be blessed.' To you first, God, having raised up His Servant Jesus, sent Him to bless you, in turning away every one of you from your iniquities."

Now as they spoke to the people, the priests, the captain of the temple, and the Sadducees came upon them, being greatly disturbed that they taught the people and preached in Jesus the resurrection from the dead. And they laid hands on them, and put them in custody until the next day, for it was already evening. However, many of those who heard the word believed; and the number of the men came to be about five thousand.

And it came to pass, on the next day, that their rulers, elders, and scribes, as well as Annas the high priest, Caiaphas, John, and Alexander, and as many as were of the family of the high priest, were gathered together at Jerusalem. And when they had set them in the midst, they asked, "By what power or by what name have you done this?"

Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them, "Rulers of the people and elders of Israel: If we this day are judged for a good deed done to a helpless man, by what means he has been made well, let it be known to you all, and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead, by Him this man stands here before you whole. This is the "stone which was rejected by you builders, which has become the chief cornerstone.' Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved."

- Notice how Peter explained that Jesus was the One on whom the Old Testament focused and was the only One through whom they could be saved and have eternal life.
- The priests and Sadducees then had Peter and John arrested and put in jail.
- On the next day the two men were brought before the high priest and a large group of other priestly leaders and commanded to explain their preaching and the healing.

- Peter continued his message of the previous day, telling them that it was by Jesus of Nazareth, the One whom they had crucified, that God raised the crippled man, and that this same Jesus, the Stone whom they had rejected, was the cornerstone of God's kingdom.
- He was saying that **those Jewish leaders could not accept the gospel of the kingdom because they refused to accept the very center, the very foundation, of the kingdom— the Lord Jesus Christ.**

Have we accepted Him?

Let's pray . . .