

I once read about a humble man who had a fine reputation as a Master Builder. Even though he lived in a modest house for many years, the homes he built were magnificent. They were beautifully designed and meticulously crafted. One day, the man announced that he was retiring. His friends and coworkers were sad to see his career end and they asked him to build one final house. He reluctantly agreed but his heart was not in it. By his standards, he slapped the house together using substandard material and paid little attention to detail. When he finished the project, his friends planned a special event to honor him for his years of service to the community. After a few tributes, the Master Builder was invited to the podium where he was presented with the key to his new house. If only he had known that he was building that last house for himself.

Did you know that you and I are building a spiritual house that we will live in forever? Peter describes it this way; “you yourselves like living stones are being built up as a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.” (1 Pe. 2:5). Jesus said, “I will build my church,” and He has enlisted us to participate in the process. There is no greater adventure than co-laboring with Jesus in this building project. Such a high and holy calling requires careful attention to detail. Paul’s prayer in 1 Thes. 5:23-24 provides important information about this house we are building together. He identifies four pillars that support this spiritual temple.

Pillar # 1 - The peace of God. Paul begins his prayer with a reference to “the God of Peace.” Why not God of mercy or grace or creation? Written during the Pax Romana when the Roman Emperor promised peace. But these early Christians were not experiencing peace. In fact, they were being persecuted. Paul’s prayer serves as a reminder that the only true peace is found in a relationship with the God of peace. In the Hebrew mind, peace is shalom and shalom is a word that sums up the way things are supposed to be. Our mission is to work toward the way things are supposed to be.

Pillar #2 - The will of God. What is the will of God? “For this is the will of God, your sanctification: that you abstain from sexual immorality; that each one of you know how to control his own body in holiness and honor. For God has not called us for impurity, but in holiness.” (1 Thes. 4:3-4, 7). In other words, while the building is under construction, so are the builders. We are being sanctified in the process. Through God’s sovereign work of sanctification, we are being formed more and more into the image of Jesus.

The ultimate goal of our sanctification is perfection. That is what “completely” means. He won’t stop until the job is done. In his classic book, *Mere Christianity*, C. S. Lewis likens the sanctification process to building a house.

“Imagine yourself as a living house. God comes in to rebuild that house. At first, perhaps, you can understand what He is doing. He is getting the drains right and stopping the leaks in the roof and so on: you knew that those jobs needed doing and so you are not surprised. But presently he starts knocking the house about in a way that hurts abominably and does not seem to make sense. What on earth is He up to? The explanation is that He is building quite a different house from the one you thought of — throwing out a new wing here, putting on an extra floor there, running up towers, making courtyards. You thought you were going to be made into a decent little cottage: but He is building a palace. He intends to come and live in it Himself.”

The sanctification process is not easy and is often painful. When Jesus said to “count the cost” it was as if He were saying,

“Make no mistake, if you let me, I will make you perfect. The moment you put yourself in My hands, that is what you are in for. Nothing less...I am going to see this job through. Whatever suffering it may cost you in your earthly life...whatever inconceivable purification it may cost you after death...I will never rest, nor let you rest, until you are literally perfect until my Father can say without reservation that He is well pleased with you, as He said He was well pleased with me. This I can and will do. But I will not do anything less.”

The vision of God for His church is that you and I would be perfect or blameless – no defects or deficiencies. Lewis again, *“He is transforming us into “a dazzling, radiant, immortal creature...a bright stainless mirror which reflects back to God perfectly His own boundless power and delight and goodness. The process will be long and in parts very painful; but that is what we are in for. Nothing less. He meant what He said. (C. S. Lewis, Mere Christianity, pp.175-76)*

Pillar #3 – The plan of God - the return of Jesus. The “Parousia” is a common motivational theme in Paul’s letters. In 4:13-17, Paul explains what happens when a person dies. He encourages his readers with the reality that Jesus is coming back, and we will be reunited in Him.

Furthermore, at the “Parousia” our work will undergo a house inspection. “According to the grace of God given to me, like a skilled master builder I laid a foundation, and someone else is building upon it. Let each one take care how he builds upon it. For no one can lay a foundation other than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. Now if anyone builds on the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw—each one’s work will become manifest, for the Day will disclose it, because it will be revealed by fire, and the fire will test what sort of work each one has done. If the work that anyone has built on the foundation survives, he will receive a reward. If anyone’s work is burned up, he will suffer loss, though he himself will be saved, but only as through fire. Do you not know that you are God’s temple and that God’s Spirit dwells in you?” (1 Cor. 3:10-16)

Pillar #4 - The faithfulness of God. This project cannot fail because God is faithful. **Because God is faithful, we can trust Him and find peace in Him because He will**

make us who He designed us to be, take us where He wants us to go, and accomplish through us what He wants us to do. Even “if we are faithless,” Paul tells Timothy in 2 Tim. 2:13, “He remains faithful for he cannot deny himself.” “He will surely do it.” Underline “HE”. You cannot accomplish this by your own strength or cleverness. God does it by His grace. I’ve wasted a lot of time in my life trying to be perfect. It is an occupational hazard for pastors – to live in fear of your congregation learning that you are a fraud. It is easy to preach about grace but not have grace for others including yourself. It is easy to preach about the importance of family while neglecting your own. It is easy to preach about the promises of God on Sunday and forget them on Monday. But God is not finished with me yet. And He is not finished with you, and He is not finished with this church. When we have drifted off course it has usually been when we were seeking success more than we were seeking sanctification. So what do we do?

First, acknowledge the problem. There is a cosmic conflict going on in the world, a contest between opposing teams – the friends of God vs. the enemies of the cross. Those who submit to the will of God and those who seek their own will. And here is the really disturbing thing about this contest – do you know where it is played? Right here within the human heart. We face the same gut-wrenching decision Jesus did in the Garden of Gethsemane – His will or my will?

Secondly, sign up for sanctification. It will not be an easy road. We are so easily distracted by the temporary glories of this created world that we take our eyes off the glorious nature of the world to come. Every day we choose to pursue the pleasures of this world or the future pleasures promised to all who are being sanctified. I wish I could tell you that you can make this decision once and for all this morning, but the truth is that you decide it one choice at a time, one minute at a time, one day at a time. But you CAN start today. You can re-commit to the process today...and tomorrow and the next day. And, in the end, when the Master Builder returns, we will offer Him what He has built. Will it be a shack, just the shell of a building or a beautiful palace in which Christ can dwell?

In Cairo Egypt, there is a graveyard that houses the remains of American missionaries. One marker reads, “William Borden, 1887-1913.” Borden, a graduate of Yale, was heir to a great fortune but he rejected the easy life to take the Gospel to Muslims. After only four months in Egypt, he contracted spinal meningitis and died at the age of 25. His epitaph reads, “Apart from faith in Christ, there is no explanation for such a life.” Not far from where Borden’s bones are buried is the Egyptian National Museum which houses the King Tut exhibit. Tutankhamen, the boy king, was only 17 when he died. He was buried with solid gold chariots as well as a vault full of solid gold objects of every kind. His gold coffin was found in gold tombs inside of gold tombs within gold tombs! The Egyptians truly believed that you CAN take it with you. Sadly, when Howard Carter discovered the burial chamber in 1922, there it was, all of King Tut’s stuff!

Consider the contrast between the two graves. Borden’s was obscure, long forgotten, overgrown with weeds in some back alley littered with garbage. King Tut’s grave glittered with gold. But where are the two men now? Tutankhamen exists separated not

only from his worldly comforts and status symbols but separated from His Creator. William Borden is safely home enjoying pleasures promised to those who trust in Christ alone. The difference? Borden invested his one, brief life participating in the glorious building project God has begun while King Tut invested his one, brief life accumulating as much as he could of what this world has to offer. How about you?

Now may the God of peace himself sanctify you completely and may your whole spirit and soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. He who calls you is faithful; he will surely do it.

PILLAR # 1 - THE PEACE OF GOD.

PILLAR #2 - THE WILL OF GOD.

"For this is the will of God, your sanctification: that you abstain from sexual immorality; that each one of you know how to control his own body in holiness and honor...For God has not called us for impurity, but in holiness."

1 THESSALONIANS 4:3-4, 7

"Imagine yourself as a living house. God comes in to rebuild that house. At first, perhaps, you can understand what He is doing. He is getting the drains right and stopping the leaks in the roof and so on: you knew that those jobs needed doing and so you are not surprised. But presently he starts knocking the house about in a way that hurts abominably and does not seem to make sense. What on earth is He up to? The explanation is that He is building quite a different house from the one you thought of — throwing out a new wing here, putting on an extra floor there, running up towers, making courtyards. You thought you were going to be made into a decent little cottage: but He is building a palace. He intends to come and live in it Himself."

—C. S. LEWIS





"Make no mistake, if you let me, I will make you perfect. The moment you put yourself in My hands, that is what you are in for. Nothing less, or other, than that...I am going to see this job through. Whatever suffering it may cost you in your earthly life...whatever inconceivable purification it may cost you after death...I will never rest, nor let you rest, until you are literally perfect — until my Father can say without reservation that He is well pleased with you, as He said He was well pleased with me. This I can do and will do. But I will not do anything less."

C. S. LEWIS

PILLAR #3 - THE RETURN OF JESUS.

"According to the grace of God given to me, like a skilled master builder I laid a foundation, and someone else is building upon it. Let each one take care how he builds upon it. For no one can lay a foundation other than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. Now if anyone builds on the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw— each one's work will become manifest, for the Day will disclose it, because it will be revealed by fire, and the fire will test what sort of work each one has done. If the work that anyone has built on the foundation survives, he will receive a reward. If anyone's work is burned up, he will suffer loss, though he himself will be saved, but only as through fire. Do you not know that you are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in you?"

1 CORINTHIANS 3:10-16

"Now may our God and Father himself, and our Lord Jesus, direct our way to you, and may the Lord make you increase and abound in love for one another and for all, as we do for you, so that he may establish your hearts blameless in holiness before our God and Father, at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all his saints."

1 THESSALONIANS 3:11-13

PILLAR #4 - THE FAITHFULNESS OF GOD.



