

# 1 Corinthians

## *Gospel-Centered Living in a Sin-Centered World*

### Section 1: Unity and the Gospel

#### The Necessity of Maturity for Unity

#### The Foundation to be Built Upon

#### *1 Corinthians 3:9b-15*

### Introduction

**ILLUS:** The Three Little Pigs

The Food to be Eaten, The Field to be Planted, and now, Paul again changes the illustration – this time moving for agriculture to architecture and from the worker to the quality of his/her work as he addresses ... The Foundation to be Built Upon

“It is one of the most significant passages in the NT that warn – and encourage – those responsible for ‘building’ the church of Christ.” (Fee, 156)

The difference, however, is that here Paul focuses on the quality of that which is being built.

### The Foundation (9b-11)

9b

“For the most part, the analogy of the building corresponds in detail to the analogy of the field. The building represents

the church, God is the owner, Paul is the founder, and workers are rewarded according to their labor.” (Taylor, 105-106)

10

This verse is filled with cogent teaching points

First, Paul notes, as he has all along, that has happened is only by the grace of God.

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

Second, Paul again points out that genuine wisdom does not come from the world but from God.

Wise

Third, Paul says that because of God’s grace and wisdom, he was able to lay the foundation for the church at Corinth.

“Master Builder” – the term in Greek is *architekton*, obviously where from which our English term architect is derived. However, in this time the designer was also the main builder.

Finally, Paul points out that in building, the same person does not do all the needed disciplines. While he laid the foundation, someone else was building on it.

Paul was careful about his foundation work, because it was what God has called him to do and his intention was for others to build upon it.

**Romans 15:20 (NKJV) — 20** And so I have made it my aim to preach the gospel, not where Christ was named, lest I should build on another man's foundation,

**ILLUS:** Carpenters, Stone masons, plumbers, etc. what if each disciple had not regard for the others and viewed their work as the entirety of the construction?

As a result, he gives this admonition – “everyone better be careful how they construct on what has gone before, because someone will be building on your work later.”

This is never more true than with the Church of Christ. We build on those who have gone before us and for those who will come behind us, because it will not be finished until the day Christ returns!

11

The foundation of the church is and can only ever be Jesus Christ.

“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 Christ and Him alone.”  
(MacArthur, 81)

**Matthew 16:18 (NKJV) — 18** And I also say to you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it.

Petros – a pebble, small stone

Petra – a rock, foundation stone

“If the foundation is not Jesus Christ, then the building is not the church.” (Taylor, 107)

## The Construction (12-13a)

12

Paul now begins to explain how one is to “take heed how he builds on it.”

Notice, it is not the size of the building but the quality of the materials.

“Gold, silver, and precious stones are rare and therefore of great value. Wood, hay, and stubble are common and consequently of little value or consequence.” (Patterson, 59)

“I personally believe Paul is referring to the ... Word of God. In each section of this chapter, the Word is symbolized in a way that fits the image of the church Paul used. The Word is food for the family, seed for the field, and materials for [building].” (Wiersbe, 580)

“As long as believers are alive, they are building. They are building some sort of life, some sort of church.” (MacArthur, 82)

13a

But note, the materials used might not be readily noticeable and lesser materials can be made to look like quality materials.

However, on “that Day” it will become clear and the materials used will be declared.

And that will be true for “each one’s work”

But when will “that Day” be?

**2 Corinthians 5:10 (NKJV) — 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.

“Bad” means “worthless”

“Bema” – present in Corinth – it was what we might think of as a public outdoor courtroom but it was not only for criminal and civil settlements, but also where warriors, champions, and citizens received their rewards.

What Paul is referring to is not a judgment from unbelievers regarding salvation (that is The Great White Throne Judgment held after the Millennial Reign of Jesus), but the judgment of believers regarding their service when Jesus returns to get His Bride, the church.

As believers, our sin has already been judged when Jesus went to the cross. He took our sin, paid our penalty, and imputed to us His righteousness.

**Romans 8:1 (NKJV) — 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.

As Patterson points out, “it is not so much a judgment as it is a determination of that which has lasting value ... In a sense, it could be termed ‘the reward seat of Christ.’” (Patterson, 61)

But make no mistake “that Day” is coming, which is where Paul goes next as he addresses ...

## The Inspection (13b-15)

13b

The testing that will come will be a testing by “fire.”

“The purpose of the fire is not punitive but rather serves the purpose of testing and disclosing the true value of one’s work for God.” (Taylor, 107)

But if it is not the fire of hell for those who are lost, what fire will it be?

**Hebrews 12:29 (NKJV) — 29** For our God is a consuming fire.

**Revelation 2:18a (NKJV) — 18a** “And to the angel of the church in Thyatira write, ‘These things says the Son of God, who has eyes like a flame of fire ...

“When the believer stands for the first time before the glorified, exalted Jesus, the gaze of our Lord shall penetrate

the very thoughts and motivations of his life.” (Patterson, 64)

14

Paul boils down the quality of construction into two categories – that which is permanent and that which is perishable.

Only enduring work brings reward.

15

Note: This is the main verse that Catholics site in support of their doctrine of purgatory.

“The fire in the metaphor does not purge a person; it tests the quality of their work (and specifically their work in building the church), either revealing it to be good or exposing it as poor.” (Wilson, 35)

It has often been asked if there are rewards given for our service to Christ, how will there be no jealousy and envy in heaven?

We all will have perfect perspective.

**ILLUS:** Picturing men as vessels, a vessel that is a pint and the other a quart, each can be full to overflowing, one can just hold more than the other.

**ILLUS:** Men dying of thirst in the desert and one finding a small artesian spring flowing to a small pool and the other finding a roaring waterfall.

Conclusion

“I think Paul is saying that each of us builds into the church what we build into our own lives.” (Wiersbe, 581)

The Scripture refers to our rewards as different crowns: the incorruptible crown, the crown of rejoicing, the crown of life, the crown of righteousness, and the unfading crown.

**Revelation 4:9–11 (NKJV) — 9** Whenever the living creatures give glory and honor and thanks to Him who sits on the throne, who lives forever and ever, **10** the twenty-four elders fall down before Him who sits on the throne and worship Him who lives forever and ever, and cast their crowns before the throne, saying: **11** “You are worthy, O Lord, To receive glory and honor and power; For You created all things, And by Your will they exist and were created.”