

Title: What Builds a Church Even in the Midst of Persecution?

Sermon Summary: Drawing from 1 Peter 2:1-8, this sermon explores the foundational principles that build and sustain a healthy church even under the pressures of persecution and spiritual attack. The pastor presents six action words as a framework for spiritual growth and church health: Remove, Cultivate, Recall, Establish, Rise, and Distinguish. Just as great architectural structures throughout history have survived because of their foundations, the church and the individual believer find their stability not in circumstances, strength, or human approval, but in Jesus Christ, the living cornerstone. The sermon calls believers to actively purge toxic relational patterns, pursue the Word of God with genuine hunger, remember God's past kindnesses, establish identity in Christ rather than human opinion, rise to their function as living stones in God's spiritual house, and discern the clear division that faith in Christ creates. The message culminates at the Lord's Table, where the cost of this unshakable foundation is remembered and celebrated.

Key Points:

- The six core words that frame spiritual and corporate church growth are Remove, Cultivate, Recall, Establish, Rise, and Distinguish
- Toxic relational sins including malice, deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and slander must be actively and deliberately removed, not passively waited out, because they destroy both vertical and horizontal relationships
- Spiritual growth is not mystical or automatic but requires deliberate, intense pursuit of God's Word with the urgency and hunger of a newborn infant
- Grace comes when we need it, not to do the work for us, but in response to our moral choices to pursue God
- Remembering God's past kindnesses is the foundation of genuine obedience, transforming it from duty-driven religion to gratitude-driven devotion
- A hateful, judgmental, or complaining spirit is rooted in forgetfulness of God's goodness
- The formula presented is: Duty begets delight, and delight ensures diligence
- Our worth and identity are not determined by human opinion, success, or approval but by God's sovereign choice

- Every believer is a living stone, not isolated or insignificant, but structurally essential to the body of Christ
- Every believer functions as part of a holy priesthood with direct access to God, offering spiritual sacrifices through worship, intercession, service, and giving
- Spiritual maturity is inseparable from community, as living stones cannot exist in isolation but are built together
- Christ is not neutral, he divides humanity into those who believe and are honored and those who reject him and stumble, and there is no middle ground
- Human rejection of Christ is not merely intellectual disagreement but moral disobedience with eternal consequences
- God's sovereign purposes will be accomplished, and human responsibility and divine sovereignty operate together without contradiction
- The foundation of God's spiritual house was not laid with stone but with the sacrifice of Christ, whose broken body and shed blood purchased our place in God's family

Scripture Reference:

- 1 Peter 2:1-8, the primary passage, addresses removing toxic relational sins, longing for the Word, coming to Christ as the living cornerstone, being built as living stones into a spiritual house, and the division between those who believe and those who stumble
- Ephesians 2:19-22 describes believers as citizens and family members built into a holy temple with Christ as the chief cornerstone
- Psalm 119:97 expresses deep love and continuous meditation on God's Word
- Psalm 119:103 describes God's words as sweeter than honey
- James 1:22 warns against being hearers of the Word only, deceiving ourselves
- Hebrews 5:13-14 distinguishes between spiritual infants who need milk and the mature who handle solid food
- Romans 2:4 speaks of God's kindness leading to repentance
- Psalm 103:1-2 calls the soul to bless the Lord and forget none of his benefits
- John 14:15 connects love for Christ with keeping his commandments

- Genesis 1 establishes human worth as rooted in bearing the image of God
- 2 Corinthians 5:7 calls believers to walk by faith and not by sight
- 2 Corinthians 5:17 declares that anyone in Christ is a new creation
- 1 Corinthians 12:27 identifies every believer as a member of the body of Christ
- 1 Peter 4:10 calls believers to steward their gifts in service to one another
- 1 Thessalonians 5:11 instructs believers to encourage and build one another up

Stories:

- The pastor recounts how his mother refused to attend church for most of his childhood, teenage years, and young adult life because of the toxic relational sins she encountered among church people, illustrating the real-world damage these patterns cause
- The pastor shares his own personal experience of being the target of malice, deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and slander directed at himself, his wife, and at times his children over decades of ministry, while also honestly acknowledging his own guilt in all five of these areas
- The historical account of the bombing of Cologne, Germany during World War II is used as an extended illustration, describing how the city was leveled to rubble while the dual spires of the Cologne Cathedral remained standing and repairable, demonstrating that the foundation determines what survives
- References to the Tower of London standing for nearly 2,000 years and the Egyptian pyramids are used to reinforce the principle that enduring structures survive because of their foundations
- The pastor shares a personal conversation with his daughter Sarah about her and her husband Brian's preparations to go to the mission field, using it to illustrate his trust in God's sovereign providence and his willingness to release his family to God's purposes even at personal cost