

Be Careful How You Build
1 Corinthians 3:10-17
October 25th, 2020

1. The church's one _____ is Jesus. (3:10-11)

2. _____ the church on the foundation of Jesus.
(3:12-15)

3. We will be _____ to the Lord of the church.
(3:16-17)

Questions for Discussion and Reflection

1. Why does Paul view it as an act of grace that he was made a wise master builder? Given the specific kind of division in Corinth addressed in chapters 1-4, why is this emphasis on his leadership role being an act of grace important? See also Eph. 3:7-8
2. How does the emphasis on Christ as the foundation for the church reiterate what has already been said in the first 3 chapters? (See 1:17, 22-24, 30; 2:2)
3. The key command in the passage is for each man to "be careful how he builds on [the foundation]." When it comes to a physical building or the point of the analogy (the church), what would be the opposite of building with care? What problems arise when people don't build with care?
4. How does adversity reveal the quality of a church? Can you think of anyways that the adversities of 2020 have revealed what is important in a church?
5. How can we build a church that is solid and lasting?
6. What is "the day" referring to in 3:13? (See also 1 Cor. 4:5; 2 Tim. 4:8; Joel 2:1-2, 11-14)
7. What affirmations and warnings are contained in 3:16-17? What might someone do that makes them guilty of "destroying the temple of God?"

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1 Corinthians 3:10-17

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Big idea: We must be careful how we build the church on the foundation of Jesus.

The day of judgment will reveal the quality of the church and we will be held accountable to the Lord in that day.

Intro

Revival in architecture of building supplies that are lasting

One builder in Oklahoma has been constructing solid brick homes that he hopes will last for hundreds of years. He describes the philosophy of their company this way:

The goal of building is human flourishing. Is it beautiful? Can it be passed down for generations? Do the materials age with grace? Does it contribute to the community? Does it inspire? Does it feel like home rather than just a house? You simply can't mass produce those qualities. ... We are fighting for a New Renaissance in building and architecture, where a commitment to beauty, craftsmanship and enduring materials enriches our lives and contributes to human flourishing.

Walls are a foot thick of solid brick, the window ledges are 5" thick limestone, the designs are beautiful.

They take longer and are more expensive in the short run but over time they last. They are still going to be solid and beautiful in 50 years, 100 years.

Something of beauty with lasting materials will always be relevant instead of a pop-up building that serves a need for a few decades but then is torn down to build something else.

While it might be cheaper and faster going up, over decades and centuries, the costs may be much greater as it is repaired and rebuilt.

Paul uses the language of constructing a building in 1 Corinthians 3. It's a timeless illustration because the same building principles apply today as 2,000 years ago.

The foundation must be solid

The materials used must be able to endure, they must be resilient.

The point is about building the church – not the structure but the people, the entity that is “the church.”

We must be careful how we build the church. We must build with lasting materials.

The end of v. 9 makes the transition to this new analogy after talking about the field.

“You are...God's building.”

The “you” is plural – you all, this church, this body of Christians – are God's building.

1. The church's one **foundation** is Jesus. (3:10-11)
 - a. Paul's role was as a “wise master builder.”
 - i. The term is one you would recognize. It's where we get our word “architect.”
 - ii. The role was more than a designer. It was like an architect and chief engineer rolled into one as the one site supervisor.
 - b. His job was to lay the foundation, which is Jesus Christ.
 - i. If the foundation is not solid and square, the whole building will be off.
 - ii. The first house my wife and I wanted to buy was beautiful on the outside. It was built in the 1920's but it had been recently remodeled with new siding and windows. The upstairs was updated to be bright and open. We made an offer, put down earnest money, and set up a home inspection. Everything looked fine until he went into the basement. He showed me the

basement walls. With a screwdriver he could just chip away at the concrete like it was made out of sand. Needless to say, we didn't buy the house!

- c. Jesus is the foundation of the church and no other foundation can be laid.
 - i. Not human tradition, ethics, ritual, political causes, social action, emotional experiences. It's not how much we like each other or have in common in life and jobs and hobbies. It's Jesus.
 - ii. He is the head of the church (Ephesians 5:23)
 - iii. He is the cornerstone (Ephesians 2:20)
- d. Paul came preaching Christ and Him crucified
 - i. **1 Corinthians 2:2** For I determined to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ, and Him crucified.
 - ii. **1 Corinthians 2:5** so that your faith would not rest on the wisdom of men, but on the power of God.
- e. We long for stability in life.
 - i. No one says, "I wish my relationships were fractured and unstable. . . I hope life throws things at me that I have no idea what to do with . . . I hope my job is ripped away from me unexpectedly."
 - ii. The stable foundation for life and for the church is Jesus.
- f. One of Jesus' most famous messages was His Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5-7. He ends by comparing the one who hears His words and acts on them as a wise man who builds on the rock:
 - i. **Matthew 7:24-27** "Therefore everyone who hears these words of Mine and acts on them, may be compared to a wise man who built his house on the rock. ²⁵ "And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and slammed against that house; and yet it did not fall, for it had been founded on the rock. ²⁶ "Everyone who hears these words of Mine and does not act on them, will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand. ²⁷ "The rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and slammed against that house; and it fell-- and great was its fall."
 - ii. The focus in Matthew 7 was on the individual life. The focus in 1 Corinthians 3 is not the individual life but our collective life in the church.
- g. The foundation of Jesus Christ is laid as we come to saving faith in Jesus and our joined to Him in saving faith and therefore receive a new spiritual family.
 - i. We're adopted into His family and we receive brothers and sisters that we didn't choose!
 - ii. Now the building project begins. It's a communal building project as we construct this thing we call the church.
 - iii. On one hand, Jesus is building His church.
 - 1. **Matthew 16:18b** upon this rock I will build My church; and the gates of Hades will not overpower it.
 - 2. He is absolutely sovereign and Lord over His church
 - iv. On the other hand – we're swinging hammers and doing the work on the ground.
 - 1. "another is building on it" v. 10
 - 2. "each man must be careful how he builds on it" v. 10
 - 3. "if any many builds on the foundation..." v. 12
- h. The words are directed primarily to leadership of a church but it applies to all of us because we all have a role in building a church.

- i. The phrase “be careful how he builds on it” is the key phrase. You may want to underline it.
2. **We build** the church on the foundation of Jesus. (3:12-15)
 - a. 6 types of building materials are listed in descending order of value. But really they fall into two categories: more expensive materials that do not easily burn and less expensive materials that burn quickly in a fire.
 - i. In the ancient world people would have built a temple out of the first category but ordinary homes out of the second category.
 - ii. Every church must ask, are the programs, activities, and worship services designed to build solid, maturing disciples or are they religious busywork or entertainment?
 - iii. Leaders should be the first to ask these questions, but all of us involved should as well.
 - b. We build on the timeless Word of God.
 - i. **Matthew 24:35** "Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will not pass away.
 - c. During normal times, the quality of the building may not seem important. But time and trial will reveal the quality, specifically the day of the Lord – a phrase used throughout the OT and NT to refer to the future, certain time of accountability that will be both deliverance and judgment.
 - i. It’s easy to gather people when times are easy and there is little cultural heat on Christians. But what if there is hardship or the cultural tide turns against Christians?
 - ii. I read an article this week that asked the question this way:
 1. Imagine that America collapses. First anarchy, then tyranny — from the right or the left. Imagine that religious freedom is gone. What remains for Christians is fines, prison, exile, and martyrdom. Then ask yourself this: Has [your church] been developing real, radical Christians? Christians who can sing on the scaffold,
 - a. Let goods and kindred go, This mortal life also; The body they may kill: God’s truth abideth still; His kingdom is forever.
 2. Not a prophetic statement that this will happen in our lifetime. But if it did, are you prepared? Not prepared in terms of your bunker is stocked with canned food and bullets, but is your heart prepared? Are we as a church preparing resilient Christians?
 3. Are we structured in such a way that we are preparing Christians like Hebrews 10:32-34?
 - a. **Hebrews 10:32-34** But remember the former days, when, after being enlightened, you endured a great conflict of sufferings, ³³ partly by being made a public spectacle through reproaches and tribulations, and partly by becoming sharers with those who were so treated. ³⁴ For you showed sympathy to the prisoners and accepted joyfully the seizure of your property, knowing that you have for yourselves a better possession and a lasting one.
 - i. Christians who can endure a great conflict of suffering?
 - ii. Who can handle being made a “public spectacle through reproaches” or sharing with those who are?
 - iii. Who joyfully accept the seizure of your property because we have a better possession?

4. This mini-trial of the past 6 months can prepare us for a greater trial, if it comes. It can sober us into considering what we value in a church. It can reveal what foundation we have built upon.
- d. Work that remains will be rewarded.
 - i. Fire is used in scripture of something that purifies and something that tests.
 1. **1 Peter 1:6-7** In this you greatly rejoice, even though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been distressed by various trials, ⁷ so that the proof of your faith, *being* more precious than gold which is perishable, even though tested by fire, may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ;
 - ii. **Matthew 25:21** "His master said to him, 'Well done, good and faithful slave. You were faithful with a few things, I will put you in charge of many things; enter into the joy of your master.'
 - iii. There will be a sense of loss for that which doesn't remain, even though we ourselves are saved.
 1. Makes it clear that this isn't a loss of salvation discussion.
 2. There will be a sense of accountability in which we look back at what we have built with our lives and in our churches and see what has been wasted.
3. We will be **accountable** to the Lord of the church (3:16-17)
 - a. We are God's temple – He dwells in us, not a building.
 - i. In other passages, this language is used of us as individuals. Here the emphasis is on us as a community of believers, an assembly, a church.
 - b. This is a sober warning to those who would intentionally harm the church.
 - i. This must not be the same warning as the sloppy builder in v. 15 that will see his work burned up but yet he will be saved.
 - ii. This sober warning is directed towards the wolves that seek to destroy the church from within or without through false teaching, slander
 - iii. The church is God's holy possession so He takes the harm of it very seriously.



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2



3

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(3:10-11)

4

1 Corinthians 2:2 For I determined to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ, and Him crucified.

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1 Corinthians 2:5 so that your faith would not rest on the wisdom of men, but on the power of God.

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2. **We build** the church on the foundation of Jesus. (3:12-15)

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10

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11

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