

BUILDING FOR THE FUTURE
I Corinthians 3:10-15

This text was written because the Corinthian Christians were in a furore. There were divisions, strife, and envyings among them. These divisions revealed the lack of brotherly love, cooperation, unity. Strife showed their desire to be superior one to another. Party spirit grew up in this way. Paul, after leaving Athens on his second missionary journey, went to Corinth, and lived and laboured there for a year and a half with uncommon success. Shortly after his departure a learned and eloquent Jew of Alexandria, Apollos by name, arrived, and proclaimed the Gospel with signal power and persuasiveness. But, unfortunately, in consequence one group exalted Apollos above Paul and the other group exalted Paul above Apollos. When Apollos retired from Corinth, certain Judaizing teachers came and presented the gospel in another form. They held that it was essential for Christians to continue observing the old Jewish law. They were bitterly opposed to Paul's teaching; and not content with condemning his doctrine they misrepresented his character, calumniated his motives, denied him a right to the name or authority of an apostle, and then exalted the claims of Simon Peter. Division creates division, strife propagates itself. This contention produced a fourth party. It drove some to say, "We are neither of Paul, nor Apollos, nor Peter, we are of Christ."

Such was the state of things at Corinth when Paul interposed. He showed the Corinthians wherein they had erred; also, what the true remedy was. Each of these men had presented the Gospel in a different way, according to the measure of insight and ability which God had given him, but what they were all anxious to convey to their hearers was simply the "Truth and the Life," in the revelation of God through Christ. He is the one dependable foundation.

A foundation is the base or undermost part of a building, wall or structure. Such foundation may be clay, rock, brick, concrete or sand. Christ is the foundation of Christianity, of Christian character, and of all the superstructures of Christianity. The foundation of life may be solid, firm secure, or it may be shoddy. It may be based upon facts, or it may rest solely upon fancies. Foundations may be shallow, or they may be solid. For the Christian life and work there is but one foundation: "For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ."

There are those who trust the superstructure of their lives, for time and eternity, upon fancies of their own or of some other man's contrivings. They are not careful about the main thing; they build their lives upon the crumbling foundation of sand. Christ warned us against that sort of thing.

There are those who think they can ignore God and build on some fanciful foundation. Some seek to build their lives upon church membership and the ordinances. They are coveted privileges and unmeasured blessings, but they are only for those who have already accepted Christ as their Saviour, as their one foundation. Others seek to build their lives upon a baneful, deceptive liberalism which is based upon the creed that it makes no difference about the church, that if one has a charitable spirit, is just in his dealings with men, or fights for his country in time of war, these things are sufficient. One can be an infidel and meet such requirements. Still others think they can work their way to heaven. So they engage in church activities and go in a swirl. Those who indulge in such loose thinking and shoddy building forget the ringing words of Christ: "Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God." Lives built on superficial foundations are doomed, in spite of appearances. Ever remember that each of us is building for the future, for this life and for the life to come. How important it is that we shall build wisely and well.

I. The Foundation of This Building.

Thank God, we do not have to lay the foundation. It is already laid for us through the love of God and by the work of the Lord Jesus Christ. We face the unalterable fact that Christ is the one and only foundation. It is simply gratuitous impudence for another to assume the role of foundation for "Other foundation can no man lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ." Paul even scouts the suggestion that one will even dare to lay beside Jesus another foundation for religion. The foundation is Christ Himself; the historical Christ of Bethlehem, of Nazareth, of Calvary, of the open tomb, of Olivet.

Ancient sayings and declarations about Christ are not enough. What proof does history have to offer as to this One Foundation? In the sands of all time He has left His footprints; in the halls of all Christian and beneficent institutions are the crimson tints of His limitless sacrifices and golden deeds; in the corridors of all generations are heard the echo of His voice. Men bow humbly before Him, look longingly up to Him, lift their voices to Him, and go out to live and die for Him. A member of a reformed Hindu religious sect asked a Christian missionary, "What have you in your religion that we haven't in ours?" He replied, "Shall I tell you in a word? You have no Christ." As Ian Maclaren declared, "The lifeblood of Christianity is Christ." Upon this Foundation countless myriads have built. Here they have found solace from sorrow, light from darkness, liberation from prison, emancipation from slavery, salvation from sin, the Bread of Life for their hunger, the Water of Life for their thirst, sight for their blindness, amelioration from suffering, strength for their weakness, and rest from their weariness. Our text makes it plain that no other foundation is permitted by Almighty God, nor needed by man, nor is possible for man.

Various ideas are connected with Christ as the foundation, e. g., selection -- He was selected by God the Father and laid by Him; suitability -- the divine and human natures in Him render Him suitable for the work He undertakes; strength -- His strength is sufficient to save and sustain all who depend on Him; and stability -- time will have no power whatever over this great foundation. Christ is the foundation of Christian faith, truth, redemption, church, privileges, activity, living, happiness and hope.

Jesus Christ is the only adequate religious foundation. He did a work that none but God could have done. Our faith centers in Him not only as a wise teacher, a high ethical doctrinaire, but as the Saviour of mankind. Christ is the one and only Saviour. There is none other name given among men whereby we can be saved.

In this foundation are the rocks of sacrificial suffering and vicarious death. Paul's most militant and powerful sermons centered in the sufferings and death of Christ. Here he found God's remedy for lost humanity. This was the grandest and chiefest of all themes with Him. In His suffering and death are the breadth of mercy, the limitless reaches of pardon, the blessing of forgiveness, the breadth of love, the example of condescension, the glow of life.

"Mercy there was great, and grace was free;
Pardon there was multiplied to me;
There my burdened soul found liberty,
At Calvary."

The sufferings and death of Christ throb with power, radiate with light, pulse with life, lift with salvation, and calm with consolation.

If our message and possession are what we profess them to be, if Christ's love is what its fruits through history prove it to be, we should hasten to trumpet its message to all the lost of Adam's race. "Love so amazing, so divine, Demands my soul, my life, my all." When Louis IX of France was young, he married the Princess Margaret of Provence. On the wedding ring that he wore from that day there was engraved, "God, France, Margaret," and he was wont to say, "I have no love outside that ring." This was the secret of his being known in history as "Saint Louis."

Jesus Christ is the world's moral foundation. He taught the loftiest of all motives. In fact, they are so high that some men call them impractical or impossible. History gives a testimony that is clear and unmistakable. Every people that has sought freedom from Brutality and corruption and has come out into a world of better things has done so by His inspiration.

Everywhere Jesus Christ meets the same deep longings. Everywhere He finds that men are susceptible to the touch of love and the thrill of pity. Everywhere He finds men to be sinning, fallen creatures, slumbering in ignorance until He comes. Everywhere He finds souls that need the salvation that He alone can bring. Unless we somehow get this Christ to the center of our civilization there is no hope for the future. Jesus Christ is the foundation of all faith and all hope. There is everything in Christ for present and future service, for sacrifice, for usefulness, and for happiness.

II. The Superstructure of This Building.

While there is but one real foundation, there are different ways of building on this foundation. On this foundation each of us must build only that which will be completely harmonious with the foundation.

Character is like a building in three respects: --

1. In the variety of its materials.

Buildings are constructed of stone, wood, iron, concrete and brick. Characters are composed of impressions that are made on us and emotions that rise in us.

2. In the unity of its design.

Every building is formed according to some plan. One design shapes the whole. So with character. The master purpose of the soul gives unity to the whole.

3. In the function it fulfils.

It is possible for us to build of one or two kinds of material -- perishable or imperishable. It is of the utmost importance that we build with imperishable material. Corresponding to our faith should be the desire to build characters and do some work which will last, and also to contribute something to the permanent and eternal structure. Making the most of one's self, doing one's best work, and doing work which will endure is an ideal which should appeal to every one of us. But when we look around it strikes us with horror to see the mass of men building, to all appearances, simply for the present.

Jesus said, "Upon this rock I will build my church." Do you lightly regard the church? Christ did not. He gave His life for it. Never fail to love and support it. "I will build my church!" What an event! What streams of influence began flowing that day! It is earth's greatest institution.

The church has weathered storms and stress, ridicule and rebuffs, sarcasm and isms, troubles and tribulations, fire and sword, spear and bayonet, fagots and frivolities, ignorance and learning, poverty and riches, infidels from without and infidelity from within. It has stood against principalities and powers, palpable wickedness and appalling indifference.

This testing of the materials which we are placing in the building of our characters and lives now will not be during the process of the building, but it will come when the building is finished. There is no escape from this final testing. Paul said, "Every man's work shall be made manifest: for the day shall declare it, because it shall be revealed in fire; and the fire shall try every man's work of what sort it is." So there will be a testing day for all our work. That test will reveal whether our work was pretentious or genuine, hasty or gradual, superficial or sound.

The one who builds with perishable materials will have his works consumed, his labor lost, and his reward forfeited. He shall suffer loss of labor, inward satisfaction and reward. The one who builds with imperishable materials will win the approbation of the Lord, will stand out in glory, and will receive suitable rewards. These rewards will be given by Christ to the individual Christian, but only in connection with Christian service rendered. Salvation is a free gift from Christ, based on what He did for us on the cross. Rewards depend entirely on what we do for Christ after we are saved.

May God help each of us to grow in grace, toil for Christ, and build wisely for the future, living day by day with the thought of eternity ever before us, knowing that when Jesus comes we shall receive a full reward.