

BUILDING FOR ETERNITY

I Corinthians 3:9-15

The membership of the church at Corinth was divided over preachers. One faction was composed of those who thought Paul was the greatest preacher in the world. Another group thought Apollos was the greatest preacher of all. To show all of them the fallacy of their position Paul told them that he was just a planter and Apollos was merely a waterer. So actually neither of them was anything, but God was everything. Therefore, said he, "What's the use of your fighting over which one of two nothings is the greater?"

Concerning them and all other Christians Paul remarked, "We are God's fellow workers." What a tremendous declaration! What a title! That is the highest tribute that can be paid to Christians. What a distinction it confers upon us! God and we are laboring together in the same work, at the same time and for the same glorious purpose.

Paul likened the Christians to a field saying, "Ye are God's husbandry." By that he meant God's tilled or cultivated field. He also likened Christians to a building saying, "Ye are God's building." That word may have two meanings -- God's structure in the sense of His erecting it, and God's possession because that which He creates and builds belongs to Him. He is the builder, and He owns that which He builds.

"Isn't it strange
That princes and kings
And clowns that caper
In sawdust rings,
And common people
Like you and me
Are builders for eternity?"

I. The Foundation Of Our Building.

A foundation is the base or the undermost part of a building, wall or structure. It may be clay, sand, rock, brick or concrete. It may be shaky or solid. Likewise, the foundation of a life may be shoddy or solid. It may be based on facts, or it may rest solely upon fancies. There are those who trust the superstructure of their lives for time and eternity upon fancies of their own or upon those which have been contrived by others. They are not careful about the main thing. They build their lives upon crumbling foundations. Christ warned against that sort of thing.

Naturally the first consideration in the erection of a house is that of the foundation. In erecting any building great care should be exercised in laying a good foundation, for if that be defective the superstructure will be a piece of folly, regardless of how beautiful it may be. Any wise builder will be careful about his foundation because it will determine the strength of his superstructure. The stability of any building depends ultimately on the strength of its foundation. If that be faulty, it will not stand the test of time. The foundation and the superstructure must be in keeping with each other. One must never build a skyscraper on a bungalow foundation.

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 Christ another foundation for religion. The foundation is Christ Himself; the historical Christ of Bethlehem, of Nazareth, of Calvary, of the open tomb, of Olivet.

In the sands of all time Christ 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 salvation from sin, liberation from prison, emancipation from slavery, 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. Other foundation is neither permitted by God nor needed by man. Christ is the only adequate religious foundation. He did a work that none but God could have done. He is the only one who can save.

In this foundation are the rocks of sacrificial suffering and vicarious death. Paul's most powerful sermons centered in the sufferings and death of Christ. Here he found God's remedy for the sins of lost men. In Christ's 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 and 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, pulsate with life, lift with salvation and calm with consolation.

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."

Christ is the world's moral foundation. He taught the loftiest of all morals. In fact, they are so high that some call them impractical or impossible. History gives a clear testimony to the fact that 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.

Unless we get Christ to the center of our civilization there is no hope for the future. He is the foundation of faith and hope. There is in Him everything for present and future happiness, service and usefulness.

II. The Superstructure Of Our Building.

While there is but one real foundation, there are different ways of building on it. Each of us should build only that which will be harmonious with the foundation.

Character is like a building in three respects -- in the variety of the materials of which it is constructed, in the unity of its design and in the function it fulfills.

It is possible for us to build with one of two kinds of materials -- perishable or imperishable. It is of the utmost importance that we build with imperishable material. In addition to our faith there should be the desire to build characters and to do work which will last through eternity. Making the most of oneself and doing one's work so that it will endure is an ideal which should appeal to every one of us. However, when we look around us, we are horrified to see the masses building simply for the present.

Christ said, "Upon this rock I will build my church." He did not regard lightly the church but gave His life for it. What streams of influence have flowed out of His churches during the intervening centuries! Christ's churches have weathered stress and storms, ridicule and rebuffs, sarcasm and isms, troubles and tribulations, fire and sword, spear and bayonet, fagots and frivolities, ignorance and learning, poverty and riches, criticism from without and unfaithfulness from within. They have withstood palpable wickedness and appalling indifference.

The imperishable materials are gold, silver and precious stones. All of these are under the earth and are not easily accessible. They must be searched for, dug up, smelted and refined.

The perishable materials are wood, hay and stubble. Out of these ordinary houses were built but not temples. Wood was used for the doors and posts; hay or dried grass was mixed with mud for the walls; and stubble was used for the roof. Wood is a dead tree. In the Scriptures a tree is a symbol of worldly glory. If you live for the praise of the world, you are building of wood. Your life may appear to be great and beautiful, and yet later be found to be of wood. Hay is dead grass. God's Word says, "All flesh is grass." If you are living simply for the gratification of the flesh, then you are building with hay. Stubble is dead grain stalks. Paul repeatedly warned us against dead works. Dead works are those which are done in the energy of the flesh and not by the guidance and the enabling of the Holy Spirit, and not for the glory of God or true love for Christ. These perishable materials -- wood, hay and stubble -- are found on the surface of the earth. They are plentiful and close at hand. They can be gained with a minimum of labor. Thus we find it in life. The best things are not the easiest to acquire but we must sacrifice for them.

III. The Testing Of Our Building.

There will be a testing of the materials which we are placing in the building of our characters and lives now. This testing will not be during the process of the building, but will come when the structure is finished. There is no escape from this final testing. "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." That test will reveal whether our work has been pretentious or genuine, hasty or progressive, superficial or sound. The fire will reveal what sort of work ours has been.

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 Christ comes we shall receive a full reward.