

1 Corinthians 3:10-15 God's Contractors Falls Ch. AM 2/4/2024

In Paul's letters, we often see pictures of builders. What we call the trades. The building trades. Brick layers, carpenters, painters. These are meant to show us how Christ is building His church. The spiritual lives of Christians together in the church, is like the ongoing process of constructing a building.

We are being built by Christ, and we are co-builders alongside of Christ.

Christ's Church is like a building that needs a lot of contractors to work on it.

Back in verse 9, Paul introduced this clearly, "...we are God's fellow workers." In the language of construction, we would say that we are God's co-workers or God's subcontractors. Paul also wrote in verse 9, "...You are...God's building." In addition to being God's building, we are also God's contractors.

1. Paul was a skilled master builder. (v.10)

(verse 10), "*According to the grace of God given to me, like a skilled master builder I laid a foundation, and someone else is building upon it. Let each one take care how he builds upon it.*"

The first thing Paul did in our passage was to acknowledge the grace that Paul had received from God. Paul knew that the 12 disciples of Jesus had received the daily teachings of Jesus, and that Paul was called later on, after Jesus' death, after Jesus' resurrection, after Jesus' ascension, and after Jesus' action from heaven to pour out His Spirit upon us. Paul knew that he had missed seeing the earthly ministry of Jesus. That was what Paul meant by his phrase later in chapter 15:8, that Paul was "*like one untimely born.*" Paul was not born in time to see the ministry of Jesus. Paul was the younger one, born later, not himself an eye witness of Jesus. Paul acknowledged this fact.

There was another fact. Paul also acknowledged the fact that God has the prerogative to call people to work whenever and wherever God wants them to work. God gave grace to Paul, and Paul said that it was God who was the source of Paul becoming a later apostle to work right alongside of the other eye-witness apostles. This was God's doing. It was God's gifting. It was by God's grace. It is all about God's calling. God summoned Paul. This was all to reveal the humility of Paul, because the next statement does not SOUND humble, does it?

"...*like a skilled master builder I laid a foundation.*" But when you remember what Paul wrote just prior, this truly was a humble statement! Paul wrote that he was like a builder, by the grace of God. Paul was like a contractor, on the job because God asked Paul to come there to Corinth! It was God's idea for Paul to work on building up that church. Paul worked under God's authority. God was even the provider of Paul's skills and Paul's abilities.

Paul knew that the Corinthian believers were familiar with these construction words because of the sheer number of various religious temples that were always being built in their city. So, Paul used construction terminology and

called himself the master builder. We would today call him the general contractor. He was the person in charge of the entire work site, brought in for the task of constructing that worshipping body. He was the supervisor over a lot of other workers for God, whom we could refer to as sub-contractors. Who tells the electrician, and the heating and ventilation technician, and the drywaller what is the plan and schedule for a job site? The general contractor does! In the ancient city of Corinth there was a church of God's people being built. How did the church get there in sin city? Who was it who told the various missionaries such as Silas and Timothy, and the elders, and the other Christian workers in Corinth what to do in order to build God's church on the job site of Corinth? Paul! Paul had been the responsible person on site daily to oversee the work, where God was building a spiritual body of people! Paul had God's blueprint. We could say Paul was the architect AND the supervisor of the job site.

Paul was even the one who got the work started. Paul gathered the first planning meetings, and Paul set up the groundbreaking. Paul Himself laid the foundation like a bricklayer. This analogy refers to the fact that Paul was a missionary Himself, who came to Corinth, started up the first conversations about spiritual things, turned those conversations into group Bible studies, then launched worship services, and worked to grow the church and alongside of elders and pastors whom God had called. So, in verse 10, Paul wrote this, "*like a skilled master builder I laid a foundation, and someone else is building upon it.*" That someone else is Apollos. In addition to Apollos, there were other persons building upon Paul's previous work, especially since Paul left the city to do work for God elsewhere. These Christians in Corinth were Paul's fellow workers, and at the same time the believers were God's fellow workers. Each Christian subcontractor served the purpose of the spiritual strengthening of the church there.

Paul added one more statement in verse 10. "...*let each one take care how he builds upon it.*" Paul simply reminded each worker to do a good job. Paul did his work as the visionary, by reminding the others to adopt the work ethic of the main contractor on this job site. To take care meant to do their work carefully. The verb is "*to see,*" which meant to watch what they were doing, to pay careful attention. Paul had previously explained this spiritual concept fully in this letter – let them preach and teach Christ and Him crucified. Which brings us to verse 11.

2. Christ is our foundation. (v.11)

(verse 11), "*For no one can lay a foundation other than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ.*"

Paul laid a foundation, he reminded them, in verse 10. What foundation? Jesus Christ! Here in verse 11, Paul explained that not Paul nor anyone else could lay a foundation other than that foundation which was already set, which is Jesus Christ. How did Paul lay a foundation? Paul came to Corinth and preached Christ

and Him crucified. Chapter 2, verse 2, “*for I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified.*”

Every house and every temple building needs a solid foundation. The word foundation is the emphasized word in this passage. If a problem developed with the foundation, it was not because of what was built on top of it. The reverse is true, if the foundation was good, then when a problem developed up above, it must be because of poor building practices up above. First thing to check is the foundation.

Paul was saying that Paul had done a good job of getting things started off right in Corinth, so why did later problems develop after Paul departed? The foundation was solid. So, that leaves only one conclusion. The only way that problems could have entered, was because in their later upbuilding efforts, they did not maintain Paul’s main motto - preaching Christ and Him crucified.

Paul was the first to preach the gospel to a city known for its immorality. The believers in the Corinth church had always heard from Paul the message and the preaching about the righteousness of God and the justice of God and the holiness of God, right alongside of the message and the preaching about the love of God, the forgiveness of God, and the gift of God of the alien righteousness of Christ.

So here in verse 11, Paul was reminding them that no one would be able to lay down a different foundation. In other words, no one would be able to take that group of people, who came together solely for the purpose of Christ, and change that group around to be gathered for any different purpose. No way. It would never work.

Paul was issuing a reminder to the workers, the builders, the leaders and the Christians in the church at Corinth. What was Paul’s reminder? None of them could teach and present a gospel other than the gospel that Paul preached. They could not change the core message. Can’t do it.

Paul and the other apostles had received this message straight from Jesus, and had proclaimed this message to Jews and Gentiles, and then had handed it down to the next generation of subcontractors as a sacred deposit from one generation of godly men to another generation of godly men.

3. Christ’s workers build on the Christ-foundation. (v.12-15)

(verses 12-15), “*Now if anyone builds on the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw— 13 each one's work will become manifest, for the Day will disclose it, because it will be revealed by fire, and the fire will test what sort of work each one has done. 14 If the work that anyone has built on the foundation survives, he will receive a reward. 15 If anyone's work is burned up, he will suffer loss, though he himself will be saved, but only as through fire.*”

It is vision. The main analogy here is ‘building on the foundation’ and that

equals = ‘building Christ’s church!’

SI - A man passing by a job site saw two bricklayers placing bricks. He asked one bricklayer what he was doing, and the bricklayer grunted in a grumpy bricklayer sort of way, “Can’t you see, I’m laying bricks?” The other, when asked what he was doing, looked up to the highest part of the building, pointed the passerby there, and said with excitement in his voice – “Sir, our team is building the best cathedral this city has ever had!”

A woman passing by two young mothers and asked one what she was doing, and she said, ‘just another day wiping drippy noses’ and she asked the other one what she was doing and she said, “I’m teaching a child to read for a lifetime.”

Vision. It is a question of vision. Do we see what we are doing when we work in the church of God?

Vision brings up the issue of the quality of materials. What sort of bricks are those? With what sort of wood are we building? What message - are we giving to the men, women and children in the church?

Paul wrote here to everyone and anyone. It referred not just to missionaries and preachers and teachers. It applied to all of them. Whenever we do any work for Christ in His church or in His kingdom, wherever we are actively serving the Lord, what spiritual resources are we using?

The general contractor asks the plumber – are you pouring lead? What he means is – is the soil stack going to be PVC plastic pipe, or is it going to be lead pipe? With what are you building?

The Session always needs to know what is being taught in all of the studies throughout our church, whether in the church building or in a home. What resources are we using to build Christ’s church?

The point was this – because the foundation was already laid, everything that Corinth added, must correspond to the foundation! What were they saying to people in all of their ministries? If they had one teacher teaching Christ and Him crucified, it did not fit to have another teacher saying one’s own efforts are what saves him or her!

We build the church with things that withstand fire. Such as gold, which is refined by fire and made more pure. SI – ladies, would it please you to get an engagement ring of yarn? Why not? Because the ring will wear out. You want an engagement ring made of gold, to show that you are building a permanent relationship of marriage.

The preciousness of the materials and value of the resources, and the quality of the materials that they used in all of their church programs, must match the preciousness and value and the quality of the resources used in building the original foundation of the church in Corinth. The foundation was the body of Christ crucified for them, and the blood of Jesus spilled for them. All of their

lessons and devotionals that we had in any of their ministries must have the same enduring truth that their foundation had – Christ victim and victor.

In every phase of Kingdom construction, always and everywhere, the quality matches Jesus in quality. Only the best for children in the church. Only the best for the elderly in the church.

Did they live by the Word of Christ? Did they apply it daily to their problems? Then they were building their spiritual house with the same truth that built their salvation in the first place.

The hash mark at the end of verse 12 shows that in verse 13, Paul was interrupting his own discussion of the whole group doing building work. Paul turned to the individual person doing building work. The question is turned to each one to look at himself or herself. In verse 13, Paul wrote that it would become manifest or evident. That means, if each person tested his/her own spiritual work of constructing work for Christ, what would the test show about his/her work? If the answer was not made obvious in this life, then on the final Day, the fires of God's judgment would show which one it was of two possible products 1) it was hay and straw and wood, which when the fire came, got burned up, OR 2) whether it was silver and gold, which when the fire came, only got refined and purified by that fire.

Paul was the general contractor in Corinth, under Christ the ultimate general contractor over His own worldwide church. Each person had to give account to Christ, for how he was building in Christ's church.

The light of day, the light of judgment will show the truth about what each of them was doing. What were determining factors in the testing process, the fires? Faith in Jesus Christ. The Spirit of Christ in their hearts.

Verse 14-15 were about the resulting consequence of the testing process.

Paul wrote two conditional sentences here. If and If.

As Paul was finishing this paragraph, this was the way to apply what he had been teaching. A test? What is the result of the test. Two possible results to a pass/fail test, right? Pass or fail.

So, the first conditional sentence is verse 14. Pass. The work of building that you have been doing survives the fire, and passes the test, and is shown to be good work building on the foundation of Christ and Him crucified. What happens if you pass the test? God promised five words at the end of verse 14, "...he will receive a reward."

What is the reward? Same as verse 8, "*He who plants and he who waters are one, and each will receive his wages according to his labor.*"

The word 'misthon' is the word for reward, compensation, wages, paycheck. It is the deep principle of reciprocation for performance. Each person would get what he or she deserved.

Don't forget what Paul wrote at the beginning of this paragraph, verse 10 began, "*According to the grace of God given to me...I laid a foundation...*" Paul's work was performed by the grace of God. We don't work for the reward, we don't work for the paycheck. However, God did bless the worker with pay for the work that he did. God was shown to be a good boss. Over in chapter 4:5, Paul wrote this sentence, "*Each one will receive his commendation from God.*" God gave good encouragement to each of His good workers. God was a gracious supervisor to the workers in Corinth.

SI - even the US military understands that morale is tied to the paychecks. Every good payroll department is truly appreciated by the employees and by the management, because workers remain motivated. Paychecks. Rewards. Wages.

It was no different in the work for the invisible Kingdom of God in building work as a contractor working for God on assignment.

Same today - you are an organizer? You are a host or hostess for some ministry in your home? You fund the work with your generous donations? You attend meetings? You do the shopping, or cook or bake something? You provide encouragement and counsel to people? You set up and take down, or work in the nursery or sound board, or orchestra or water and cut the lawn, or shovel and salt the sidewalk, or bring a crockpot of soup for a fellowship lunch?

How would you like a reward for that?

How about this reward? One fine day, we stand before our Savior in person, for it is not many years from now – and Jesus turns to you and says, your contract and your building work that I assigned to you – you took it up cheerfully, completed it with vision, with the right attitude, you did it faithfully, and you were happy to have little recognition on earth. You know what? I saw it all. I am here to announce to you and to all of the saints of heaven – well done! Well done, my son or daughter – and by the foundation of my crucifixion, I invite you to enter into the joy of my eternal home, and see all that I have done in multiplying your efforts! The work is over. It is time to rest and enjoy. Well done. Welcome home.

My everlasting friends, that is the best reward that there is.

But there is more! We still have verse 15. This is Christians. This could be you. Let's say you had mixed motives. Let's say you were prideful and demanded attention and accolades. Let's say you were building your own little kingdom, and lusted after power and influence. Let's say you were doing the right things but inside you were grumbling and griping? Let me put it starkly, so you don't miss it. What if you sinned in your contract of building up the church of Christ?

When we appear before Christ, what then? Our Lord is filled with mercy and He will not give you what your sins deserve. But do you think that the work-reward system is broken in the house of God? No. The paycheck for shoddy work cannot be the same as the paycheck for good work. When we sin, we miss out.

When we have a bad attitude, we lose out on the beautiful things that could have been ours in Christ, in addition to our soul's salvation. We are not just saved, we are contractors building the church. But if we don't build the way Christ builds, and we won't build the way Paul builds, with humility and all by God's grace, and in a Christ-like way, then we cannot expect the same kind of payday, can we?

Conclusion: The church is built up by grace.

No matter how much we messed it up, Paul the apostle, Paul the preacher, Paul the gospel communicator makes sure that we have something clear before we complete our study of this paragraph.

What is clear? That our salvation is not by works, but by grace. No matter how much we as Christians mess up our assigned places of serving the church, our souls are kept safe by the protector of our souls. You lose some payout, but you don't lose your salvation, you don't lose your access to heaven and its streets of gold, you don't lose your eternal future of love, warmth and genuine welcome from our magnanimous Savior Jesus Christ. He says, my child, look to Me - crucified for you. My grace is sufficient for you and for your failings.

There is a raging fire of the holiness of the final building inspection of God. All of your work will be burned up, because honestly, you stink as a subcontractor. But never, ever, forget this one thing - As my child, you smell sweet to me. Welcome home. You belong here, for I placed you into my building. You are part of the household of God, so come on in and enjoy My gifts to you forever. My blood has purchased you. You belong to Me.