

Scripture Reading: I Corinthians 3

“5 Who then is Paul, & who is Apollos, but ministers through whom you believed, as the Lord gave to each one? 6 I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the increase. 7 So then neither he who plants is anything, nor he who waters, but God who gives the increase. 8 Now he who plants and he who waters are one, and each one will receive his own reward according to his own labor. 9 For we are God’s fellow workers; you are God’s field, you are God’s building. 10 According to the grace of God which was given to me, as a wise master builder I have laid the foundation, and another builds on it. But let each one take heed how he builds on it. 11 For no other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. 12 Now if anyone builds on this foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw, 13 each one’s work will become clear; for the Day will declare it, because it will be revealed by fire; and the fire will test each one’s work, of what sort it is. 14 If anyone’s work which he has built on it endures, he will receive a reward. 15 If anyone’s work is burned, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire.”

“Bearing Fruit With Patience”

My message this morning will in some ways be an extension of the work Pastor Liberati has done with the Parable of the Sower. There we learned the importance of tending to the condition of our hearts and the importance of God’s work in our hearts to properly prepare them to receive the Word and to bear fruit.

- It is that bearing of fruit that I want to focus on this morning and I want to do so in practical ways.

We are saved by Grace and we are instructed to continue in Grace but in both cases the impact of Grace is very real & practical: In the former we are taken from the Kingdom of darkness into the Kingdom of light and in the later we are called on to walk in the good works we were created in Christ Jesus to walk in as Paul said in Ephesians two which we studied at length in our Ephesians series. And something the Apostle stressed in Colossians 2 as well:

“6 As you therefore have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him, 7 rooted and built up in Him and established in the faith, as you have been taught, abounding in it with thanksgiving.”

- So if we believe that God created us in Christ Jesus to walk in good works as we have been taught, do we think those works are important?

Going back to that Parable of the Sower, it was only those who bore fruit who had eternal life!

We can never teach or think that we receive eternal life on the basis of our good works, anymore then we could imagine a field properly plowing itself:

- But our salvation will produce fruit, some thirty, some sixty and some a hundred fold as Jesus said.

To consider what that fruit should be,

I turned to another passage about fruit in I Corinthians as our text. We see there another reference to agriculture and then a discussion of works not based on quantity but on quality, remembering of course that both are important.

We read in verse 6, “I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the increase. 7 So then neither he who plants is anything, nor he who waters, but God who gives the increase.”

So, we rightly proclaim “all Glory to God” as we should, but Paul does not dismiss our responsibility as he continues in verse 8” “Now he who plants and he who waters are one, and each one will receive his own reward according to his own labor. 9 For we are God’s fellow workers; you are God’s field, you are God’s building.”

So, Paul has been using an agricultural example as Jesus often did and now he shifts to the building metaphors which Jesus also used [remember the houses and foundations at the end of the Sermon on Mount?] The Apostle continues that shift at verse 10: “According to the grace of God which was given to me, as a wise master builder I have laid the foundation, and another builds on it. But let each one take heed how he builds on it. 11 For no other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ.” Paul likely has the very example Jesus used in mind as he speaks about the one foundation of rock upon which a house that will prevail in the winds and storms of life must be built!

And so we see our good works, those we were created in Christ Jesus to walk in, as the work of building the house. The Apostle Paul now points out that not only is the foundation essential, but we should be wise about what materials we use in building our lives...

12 “Now if anyone builds on this foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw, 13 each one’s work will become clear; for the Day will declare it, because it will be revealed by fire; and the fire will test each one’s work, of what sort it is.

14 If anyone’s work which he has built on it endures, he will receive a reward. 15 If anyone’s work is burned, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire.”

- The bottom line should be that we want to be those who bear fruit at the hundred fold level AND have the quality of that fruit be Gold!

Now comes the practical part:

Just what do those works look like: How do I go about living as Jesus wants me to live, walking in the good works He created me to walk in?

- For this morning I want to argue that we do this through wisdom and experience!

These should stand in stark contrast with what the world and sadly many within the Church would stress with feelings and fads. Thousands of books have been written to help us find ourselves and learning to do what is right for US! If it does not feel right, I am not interested doing that!

And the latest fads are closely related to those feelings. [Book store tale]

- So why do I stress wisdom and experience?

Wisdom should be obvious because that is what we are instructed to seek and we know that the beginning of wisdom is the fear of the Lord.

By that wisdom we can determine which works are the kind that are refined by that fire and what others are simply burned away.

- Obtaining such wisdom requires prayer and the study of God’s Word. We are not born with such knowledge and there are no shortcuts.

And what do I mean by experience? Here I have in mind both practice and examples or instructions. Think about someone who wants to be a good baseball player. Does it require a lot of work and practice? Of course it does, but why then do we have coaches? Without an experienced coach to guide our practice we could simply be reinforcing bad habits.

- It is no different when it comes to living the Christian life, starting with good habits, or practice, along with parents & church leaders who are Lord-willing the coaches you need.

In other words, the fruitful Christian life does not come about automatically, nor does it come by yourself! You have been brought into Christ and His Church. There are no lone rangers in the Kingdom that produce the right quantity of fruit nor good quality fruit.

So how does a young man become a productive man in God's Kingdom? By learning from both the Scriptures AND the examples of mature men!

- **Obviously the same is true with young women and our older women.**

And yes this is true with families and even churches as well.

So I want to touch on a few examples and as I worked on this it reminded me of one of the talks Pastor Wilkins gave on marriage & family which he entitled, Ten Ways to Destroy Your Children.

It was an attention grabbing title, and he began by assuring the listeners that he had done all ten with his children. So as I share these examples, please remember that I have failed in some way with all of them as well.

- **So back to the wisdom front: Do you have a regular time & place for prayer in your life?**

If you do, guard it and continue it! If the answer is no, then you need to change that starting tomorrow. IF you think you life is just too busy and chaotic to find such a time each day, you may have just discovered why your life is so busy & chaotic!

- **If you are married and/or have a family this should include times of prayer with them as well.**

Closely related to this is having regular time in God's Word as well as listening to or reading good material! There are tons of study programs and suggestions for reading the Bible, but the important thing is to put one into practice! [share my example of the reading schedule, story of Al & I listening to church history] What was the last good book that you read? What was the last book you read with your parents or spouse?

- **Amazing what productive discussions come from such times!**

Life is full of decisions and actions that we must deal with each and every day, and we must be equipped to know how to make the right ones! So now we come to experience...

Basically there are two ways to learn: We can learn from our own experience or from the experience of others.

- **Having that foundation of wisdom helps us do both better!**

We gain experience from doing the right things IF we know what the right things are: For example, a husband who takes seriously the command to love His wife as Christ loves His own Church, will learn to do that better and better over the years!

On the other hand, a husband who focuses on himself and his needs will pile up a whole lot of bad experiences and wonder years later why his marriage is such a mess...

And then likely blame his wife.

- **But again, experience is not limited to only what we do in our own lives because we can learn from the experience of others, like couches.**

This is why the older women are instructed to teach the younger women, and wise younger women will listen to them, rather than following the latest fads.

Of course when it comes to learning from the experience of others, we can learn good things from good examples and all the wrong things from bad examples [*why good friends are important*].

Think about the contrast we are given by those who came before us in the Old Testament: We have the hall of faith in Hebrews 11 with examples of faithful living. We can go back and study their lives and learn about how faith should work itself out in our lives.

On the other hand we have the Apostle Paul warning us about the bad examples we can find in the Old Testament where at I Corinthians chapter ten he says this:

“ 8 Nor let us commit sexual immorality, as some of them did, and in one day twenty-three thousand fell; 9 nor let us tempt Christ, as some of them also tempted, and were destroyed by serpents; 10 nor complain, as some of them also complained, and were destroyed by the destroyer. 11 Now all these things happened to them as examples, and they were written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the ages have come.”

As one who has spent a lot of time reading the Old Testament, I cannot count the number of times I thought to myself: WOW that was really stupid...

- **But then God quietly reminds me of the many stupid things I have done over the years, making me ever more thankful for His Grace.**

Some may be thinking at this point, OK, I will pray more, study my Bible more and look to better examples... But that still leaves me wondering: Just which works are which? Is there a list of gold, silver and bronze things I can work on? How about the wood hay and stubble to avoid?

- **Here we must remember that our Christian life is not mechanical, but rather relational.**

What do I mean by that? As we pray and study, God will not give us a “to do” list for each day complete with the proper motives. No, we walk in faith day by day trusting God for His direction and guidance. To use an old example, helping an older lady across the street would likely fall into the category of a good work, maybe even a gold one!

However, IF I help that lady hoping someone will see my good deed, it suddenly is a matter of pride & could be some of that hay to be burned away. We cannot simply go about looking for all those good things to get credit for, but rather we must live each day in a Christ like manner because of who we are and Who we serve.

- **In other words I don’t get up each morning thinking what good deeds can I do today, but am always ready to help a lady in need.**

Husbands should not get up each morning thinking what can I do to love my wife today, but rather love her in whatever ways are needed that day.

That could be changing a dirty diaper while she is attending to breakfast or doing great work so you can earn a promotion and more money!

- **I suspect the first would fall under gold and the later maybe bronze!**

That should remind us that only the Spirit knows for sure and of course we will certainly find out when they are judged by the fiery test.

- **I think I also need to remind us that the Christian life is not something we can hurry through!**

Several times in our journey through Ephesians we were given overwhelming tasks and I would ask how we walk a mile: The answer of course is one step at a time, and that is what obedience looks like in the Christian life.

- **We pray and seek wisdom, consider the experience of other and then put things into practice in our lives.**

Well disciplined children are not gifts given to some and not to others:

They are the result of following God’s commands & the good example of others.

There is no magic button to push and yes it is a years long obligation that if done properly is certainly in the gold or silver list of good works.

Healthy marriages are not handed out at only certain marriage ceremonies! They involve years of commitment, laboring together, confessing sins, prayers and yes discussions that lead you to be of one mind. *[mention time when children are young.]*

- And since God says that our marriages are the creational representation of His very Nature, those certainly come in the Gold category.

Young people do not automatically grow up to be mature and productive Saints! As you grow older you have a greater and greater responsibility for you own actions. While reaching the next level in the latest video game can be fun and entertaining, taking that same time to read a good book or listen to a teaching series would bear fruit for years to come in your life.

- And PLEASE beware of those fads and make sure you are seeking out the experience of the right people.

If you want a good career or strong family you need to seek out older people who have achieved those things, not be taking advice from your peers who know about what you know.

[mention young married classes]

I could go on with examples of Church and the work place or even politics but I think you get the idea.

- God created us in Christ Jesus for good works and we are expected to walk in them, not in order to be saved but to glorify the One Who gave His life to save us.

So as we ponder all of this I want to return to that Parable of the Sower where Luke's account ended with these words from Jesus, "15 But the ones that fell on the good ground are those who, having heard the word with a noble and good heart, keep it and bear fruit with patience."

You cannot rush a crop and we cannot rush Christian maturity. It happens day by day, step by step. Consider again those contrasting objects: Gold, silver and jewels form slowly and must be carefully refined or cut.

- And then the fires of judgment only refine them further.

Wood, hay and chaff come and go and only get burned up by the fire. We should also consider their appearance: Wood, hay, and chaff tend to be large and showy... While gold silver & jewels are smaller and far more precious. Sadly much of the busyness of our Christian walk is producing lots of wood or hay to be seen, which in the end will likely be burned away by that fire of God's judgment.

- Those evening discussions among a couple, that small step to teach a child obedience or quietly reading that next book may not get much attention at the time, but they are building treasures that will last and be rewarded.

As we go forth we can meditate on the words of Psalm 1 as a great summary of the importance of wisdom and experience as opposed to feelings & fads, so we can be those who produce much good and valuable fruit: Psalm 1: "Blessed is the man Who walks not in the counsel of the ungodly, Nor stands in the path of sinners, Nor sits in the seat of the scornful; 2 But his delight is in the law of Jehovah, And in His law he meditates day and night. 3 He shall be like a tree Planted by the rivers of water, That brings forth its fruit in its season, Whose leaf also shall not wither; And whatever he does shall prosper. 4 The ungodly are not so, But are like the chaff which the wind drives away. 5 Therefore the ungodly shall not stand in the judgment, Nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous. 6 For Jehovah knows the way of the righteous, But the way of the ungodly shall perish."

Communion Meditation: I Corinthians 10

"Moreover, brethren, I do not want you to be unaware that all our fathers were under the cloud, all passed through the sea, 2 all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea, 3 all ate the same spiritual food, 4 and all drank the same spiritual drink. For they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them, and that Rock was Christ."