

10 According to the grace of God given to me, like a skilled^[b] master builder I laid a foundation, and someone else is building upon it. Let each one take care how he builds upon it. ¹¹ For no one can lay a foundation other than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. ¹² 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.

In the introduction to this sermon we must reflect upon the previous apprehensions that our Apostle had concerning the spiritual health of the Corinthians. You might remember Paul sharply rebuked the Corinthians for their inability to grasp the deeper, more comprehensive distinctions concerning theological matters, he equated the Corinthians to that of little babies, spiritual infants still only able to drink and digestion the very base level fundamentals of Christianity, when in fact they should have been able to eat, chew and digest theological meat. The deeper matters of divinity. They were an older congregation in terms of their existence as a church, God had bestowed upon them every spiritual gift, they were enriched in all speech and knowledge according to 1 Corinthians 2, but yet in their pride, factionalism, and immature rivalries, its as if the Holy Spirit withheld from them new measures of spiritual growth, progress in sanctification, and here they were, blessed from God and enriched in abundance with capabilities and tremendous potential, still acting like little Christian babies. Paul was not happy about this.

In fact, we know all too well that he was frustrated, perplexed, and all together disappointed with his precious sheep. Those holy saints of God, chosen and precious and gifted to Paul for pastoral oversight. Paul was vexed. He ends the epistle with agricultural analogy to

dismantle and reestablish the fact that the Apostles ultimately were nothing but instruments, vessels in the master's hand to accomplish the glorious purposes of planting and establishing the church, assigning elders, and assisting in raising up the chosen people of our lord Jesus Christ. In Paul reinstating this reality to the church he says that he waters, Apollos plants but it is God and God alone that gives the growth, in other words, get it out of your heads and hearts not Corinthians that any one of you surpasses the other in nobility and grandeur, remember that it is God alone at work amongst you to accomplish the purposes of the church found in Jesus Christ, and the reason you are weak, ignorant, and of the flesh is because you are acting like little boys in the club house fighting over who gets to play leader and who is the greatest amongst the boys. Paul launches into a further explanation on these matters in verses 10:

10 According to the grace of God given to me, like a skilled^[b] master builder I laid a foundation, and someone else is building upon it. Let each one take care how he builds upon it. Now it is obvious that the apostle Paul is a master architect in laying the foundation for the new covenant church. He has planted churches throughout Greece, Macedonia and Asia minor, The Apostle Paul has no reservations about retelling the Corinthian readers that he indeed has been commissioned to his apostolic office by Christ, to lay the foundations of the new covenant church. Paul has spent his entire Christian life rigorously, painstakingly, laboring, toiling, and striving to lay the foundations of the church within the entire expanse of the known world, and the apostle has suffered an incalculable amount to do so.

In fact, he faced death numerous times in his various missionary endeavors to lay these very foundations so that other men can build upon it. So he may have good and qualified men assign elders to build upon the foundation that has been laid by the Apostle, and not only elders my friends, but let us remember that according to Ephesians 4 elders are assigned to equip the

saints for the work of the ministry so you and me likewise have a very important and distinct role in building up the church, making it strong, pure, holy, powerful, and militant in a very good way. But lest any of the Corinthians find Paul to be bragging, find Paul to be acting in a like manner with the Corinthians in their factions and rivalries, Paul makes preeminent at the onset of his declaration of being a master builder who lays a foundation Paul says that it is the grace of God given to the Apostle.

It was God and his marvelous grace poured out and distributed amongst the twelve apostles as they worked and labored to build the foundations of the church. It was God and his grace that provided Paul a successful voyage to the areas in which he then laid the foundation, and it was God's grace that brought salvation to those who would then comprise the congregations in the territories in which Paul began to lay the foundation of the new covenant church by gospel preaching and teaching. If Paul is to speak of his ministry activities, Paul will preface his speech with the sovereign grace of God.

¹¹ For no one can lay a foundation other than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ is the foundation of the church, the head and king of the church and without Christ you have nothing, no life, no power, no salvation, no church. The foundation was laid was through declaring Christ's gospel. Christ's incarnation, life, death, burial, resurrection, ascension and session. This remains to this day the distinguishing feature of a true church. When Christ alone is the foundation then you see an orderly church, you see a healthy church and one wherein the spirit of Christ is pleased to dwell. A church that has Christ as the foundation will have its whole structure build up solid by the brick and mortar of Bible exposition, administration of the ordinances, prayer, evangelism, missions, all empowered by the Spirit to a

people who are zealous for Christ, zealous for holiness, and good deeds. When Christ is truly the foundation, you will in fact see a true church.

Look around you my dear friends, at our evangelical climate and evaluate for yourselves if the foundation for what you see is Christ. What a degradation there has been of true religion in our country since the time of its conception. If there was ever a season of spiritual prosperity in the church it was when churches were built upon the foundation which is Christ. Christ was exalted, Christ proclaimed, Christ expounded from the text of the Holy Word, Christ brought into the highways and by ways in our cities and towns, Christ as the focus and center of our praying, Christ brought to the nations by way of missionary endeavor. Christ's blood and body consumed at the Lord's Table, Christ honored in the homes of the people of God.

You see this is the ripple effect that occurs when the foundation of the church is Christ. There is no other foundation but Christ. Do you ever wonder why most churches you have either come from and left to come here or that you have visited deal in pragmatism, smoke and mirrors, bells and whistles, pop psychology, theatrics and entertainment? Because their foundation is sinking sand. My dear friend my vow to you before God is that if I have opportunity to preach to you and to serve you, and I know the elders would agree I will build on the foundation of Jesus Christ for you and for the glory of Christ. This was likewise Paul's declaration to the Corinthians back in chapter 1 where he says I came to know nothing amongst you except Christ and him crucified. You see Paul laid the foundation of Christ and he was explicit in making this preeminent to the Corinthians.

12Now 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.

Now Paul makes an interesting transition in these following texts to the foundation that is built from Christians within the church and the quality of good works on the day of judgement as it is tested by fire. Now clearly the analogy here is one of discussing the type and quality of good works one performs in this life. The builder analogy correlates to the quality of good works by saying that gold, silver, stone, are strong, quality, lasting good works that will pass the test of the fire of judgement. Then there are the examples of wood, hay, straw, which one can infer that these works will be ones that burn up in the fires of judgement Commentator Simon Kisenmaker says “Paul interprets the metaphor of building not to call attention of the collected work of the church, but to the work of each believer. Each person will have to give an account of what he or she has done with Gods revelation of his son. Everyone will individually stand before the lord at the time of judgement. Paul uses the imagery to show what people do with Gods revelation in Jesus Christ. Some live by that word and apply it to their daily lives and develop spiritually as they seek to edify themselves and fellow believers, these people are vitally interested in sound doctrine, and the pure preaching of Gods word. They build their spiritual houses wit the precious metals and stones of the living word. Others lead shallow lives with a veneer of Christianity and they seem to be satisfied living in ordinary houses of wood hay and straw.”

My friends you must realize that each one of you are responsible for your contribution to the building up of the church. Each one of you will stand before the Lord in judgement, and for those of you who have lived lives of serious, unadulterated, earnest commitment to the Lord Jesus Christ, you can be sure that you are building with the solid material of gold, silver, and stone. But to some of you, who care very little about Christ, who seem to be content with living in wood and straw huts, it will all be burned away, and the loss of reward will be great. Now admittedly that is a pretty broad and general statement from me and from Paul in these verses, and we would be better equipped to expound this concept of rewards and loss of rewards before the judgement in much greater detail and even to discuss more so what a life should look like biblically speaking that is one who is building on gold as compared to straw, but time does not permit us to go any further than what we have.

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.

There is a reiteration in these closing verses that the work that we do in the time of our early pilgrimage counts for eternity. We of course rent talking about working to merit favor before God, or working to keep our justification, that absurd and a Romish perversion of these texts, but rather this is the evaluation of the quality and purity of work performed by a Christian in the short vapor of a life that he lives before the Lord. Your life counts my Christian friend, and not every one of you will receive an equal measure of rewards in heaven. The thief on the cross will have a tiny little sliver of reward, compared to a Jonathan Edwards for example who live a much longer and more fruitful life as he was wholly consecrated to the Lord Jesus Christ in every single aspect of his life. Now of course both the thief on the cross and Edwards will receive the ultimate reward of being ushered into the presence of God and the lamb where they

will live in perfect paradise and then at the resurrection their souls will be reunited with their bodies and then they will dwell together with Christ and all the saints on the new heavens and the new earth, however the principle in these texts is to say that more rewards will be given to those who have sought the Lord with more diligence and fever.

I am certain my friends that the reward will ultimately be closer fellowship with God, more intimate knowledge about God. Jonathan Edwards once talked about this principle of starting at different mountain peaks. Some will simply be closer to the lord than the other based upon that which was accomplished on earth and the reward of closer intimacy and fellowship granted to the believer as their reward.

¹⁵ If anyone's work is burned up, he will suffer loss, though he himself will be saved, but only as through fire.

Some of you my friends may fall into this category. Those who coast through the Christian life. Those who spend very little time in fellowship with God. Those who have anything and everything as a priority above God. True Christians I'm speaking of, not deceived individuals. I believe there are Christians who come here, leave, and don't have two thoughts in their mind about Christ until their husband or wife reminds them that its time for church on Sundays. It's a tragedy to me, and of course in my flesh I'm tempted by these very same things. Even good things. I'm a lover of history, of music, I love researching many subjects and I could spend all day long distracted and preoccupied. But my friends God in my weakness reminds me that as the missionary CT Studd once said, only one live twill soon be past, only what's done for Christ will last. But tragically to those who intentionally live shallow, undisciplined, uncommitted, prayerless, and trivial lives as a Christian, their works will be burned up, and they will suffer much loss. I guarantee when they enter glory they truly would wish that they would have spent every waking moment serving the Lord Jesus. Great loss on the day of judgement.

But by the grace of God they themselves will be saved, although through the purification of their works being tested and burned up by fire. My Christian friend don't be the man who builds the structure of their lives with hay, wood, and straw. Now of any time in the history of our country, we need bold, strong, zealous, committed, serious, intelligent, capable, mature, godly, prayerful, selfless Christians. Those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, hunger and thirst for God.

May it be that this church continues to set the precedence for such as this, where many of you are exactly as I'm describing. What a joy to my heart to be amongst you my dear saints and may it be that you would pray for this very needy man that I likewise would be one in which God would be pleased to shine his face upon and to grant me a full reward for a life of continual, unadulterated commitment to the glory of Jesus Christ,