

# T-R-O-U-B-L-E

Special Message  
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Summary: Three observations from Revelation 2-3 on how to handle trouble in the church: 1) Expect it, 2) Redeem it, 3) Grow from it.

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## Introduction

If you have been around here for a while you know that the past three years at Agape have been pretty rough. This church has been in existence about eight years. In our first five years as a church, things went relatively smoothly. There was a lot of unity, a lot of spiritual progress, consistent growth, no major conflicts or problems. Our biggest struggle was what to do about the facility, because we were so packed out every Sunday that we were completely out of space. That was the first five years. But then about three years ago, some storms began to hit us – three major storms, one right after another, that rocked this church. The fact that this church even exists today is a testimony to the grace of God, because all three of those storms were the kinds of things that in many cases result in a church shutting its doors. Some of the confusion and controversy about all that is still ongoing, which is why we are having a congregational meeting this afternoon – so we can let you all know what is going on and answer everybody's questions. Combine those storms with some of my weaknesses as a leader that made matters even worse, and it all adds up to some extremely difficult challenges.

So what should we do? Well, one thing that is very important to us in this church is to make sure that we order all our steps by God's Word. We want all our decisions, all our reactions, and all our interactions with each other to be governed by the principles of Scripture. And so instead of going right back to our series in James right away, as I prayed and asked the Lord's guidance for what He wanted to say to us as a church going into this meeting, I believe He guided me to the topic of what Scripture teaches about how to deal with trouble in the church. Our most natural reaction when trouble hits the church is to have responses driven by emotion or human wisdom rather than by biblical principles. And so to guard ourselves against that, I think we would do well this morning to spend our time focusing on what Scripture teaches us about out to handle problems in the church.

So we will be looking at the New Testament as a whole, but I want to especially focus on how Jesus dealt with problems in His church in the letters that He sent to the seven churches in Revelation. This will not be a full-blown study of everything in those letters. I just want to draw your attention to three lessons that we can draw from these chapters. And these three lessons will help you not only in dealing with

problems in the church, but these same principles apply to any problems in your life - in your family, or in your own personal life.

Have you ever wondered why chapters 2 and 3 are in the book of Revelation? Don't they kind of spoil an otherwise spectacular story? In the book of Revelation you have the good guys and the bad guys. Christ and His people versus the devil and his people. The devil and his people are horrible and wicked and vile and they end up being destroyed. Christ appears as glorious and awesome and all-powerful, and His glorious bride appears at the end of the book with dazzling beauty in the New Jerusalem. But in chapters 2 and 3 we read about the individual, local churches. And at first they almost seem to be a blight on the pages of the book of Revelation. These are God's people, and yet the words glorious, beautiful, spectacular, dazzling, powerful – none of those words apply. What we see instead is weak, beaten-down, sin-laden local fellowships that are absolutely shot through with major, problems. I think what the Lord is showing us in that is that when it comes to how to deal with trouble in the church, lesson number one is, *expect it*.

## Expect It

This is the reality about the church in this age – there will be problems. Don't let them take you by surprise. Very often people become rattled and unsettled when problems arise in the church. They get uneasy, and think, “oh – something's wrong,” and it makes them afraid.

**1 Peter 4:12 Dear friends, do not be surprised at the painful trial you are suffering, as though something strange were happening to you.**

That applies in your personal life, in your family, and in your church. Don't get rattled, don't think the sky is falling – this is to be expected.

**Job 5:7 Man is born to trouble as surely as sparks fly upward.**

Just as surely as sparks fly upward, people, families, and churches are going to have problems.

## Tools in the Redeemer's Hands

Last week I gave you a one sentence summary of the entire Bible: the creation is ruined and then redeemed. God creates the world, it gets broken by sin and the curse, and then He fixes it to be better than it was to begin with. That is the summary of the whole Bible, but the reason the Bible is 66 books instead of just one sentence is because God has a whole lot to say to us about *how* He is going about fixing what is broken. It is the story of redemption. God wants us to understand His plan because we play a role in it. The very first thing God revealed about how He would go about fixing what's broken is that he would call out a special people and work through them. And now, in this period between the first and second coming of Christ, that special people is the church. Local churches like us are the tools that God is using to repair what is broken.

## Churches Are Broken Tools

Now, you might hear that and look around and say, “Wait a minute – we are the tool God wants to use to repair what's broken? How is that going to work? *We're broken!*” Exactly! God is so powerful and so wise that He can fix what's broken in this world using broken tools. And that is not plan B for God. He is not just making due. This is exactly how He designed it. It has always been His intention to demonstrate his power and wisdom by bringing about redemption using broken instruments. In 1 Timothy 1:16 Paul says that the reason God chose to use him was because he was the worst of sinners. If God used sinless, powerful angels to do it, it wouldn't show His glory as much. People would be impressed with the angels. But when He uses broken, shattered, sinful, weak, hobbling local church fellowships to do His mightiest work – that really shows His power and glory and mercy and wisdom.

Every church is broken and messed up. Every member of every church is broken and messed up. And if you doubt that, just read through the New Testament. Read about every church you can find described in the New Testament and you will see they all have one thing in common – problems. There was trouble and controversy in sin and confusion and disagreement in the church right from the very beginning. Disobedience, disorder, discord, disqualification, desertion, discouragement, disagreement, divisions, disunity... Do you know how long it took before there was the first church split? The tomb was empty on Easter morning; the women insisted that an angel appeared and that Jesus rose from the dead. The rest of the disciples did not believe them, and later that afternoon started leaving to go back to their homes. That was the first church split. It happened *the very same day* that Jesus rose from the dead – His people were divided on whether or not He rose from the dead.

Another one came up in Acts 6 when the out-of-town believers accused the local believers of showing favoritism in the benevolence ministry. Then there was a huge conflict in Acts 15. A doctrinal debate came up about circumcision.

**Acts 15:2 This brought Paul and Barnabas into sharp dispute and debate with them.**

Do you think that made some people uncomfortable – to see these leaders of the church in this major, public argument and dispute? That controversy never went away – it dogged their steps throughout the New Testament. Later in that same chapter, Paul and Barnabas get into it with each other. Prior to this, Mark had deserted them on one of their journeys. Barnabas thought Mark could be restored to ministry, but Paul didn't.

**Acts 15:39 They had such a sharp disagreement that they parted company.**

That is the book of Acts – what about the rest of the books in the New Testament? Those books exist mainly because the Apostles were writing letters to address problems in all the various churches. If there were not problems in those churches, we would not have a New Testament! The people in the church in Rome were judging each other and looking down on each other because they made different judgment calls on disputable issues (Ro.14). The church in Corinth was a train wreck. They had factions and divisions (ch.1-3). They were assessing things based on human wisdom (ch.2). They were questioning the authority of the Apostles (ch.4). They were failing to exercise church discipline (ch.5). They were taking each other to court (ch.6). They were engaging in idolatry and sexual immorality (ch.6). They were abusing the Lord's Supper to the point where God was striking some of them with illness and even death (ch.11). They were abusing the spiritual gifts, and operating without love (ch.12-14). Their meetings were chaotic and disordered (ch.14). And they were questioning whether the resurrection will happen (ch.15).

The churches in Galatia were abandoning the gospel altogether and turning to a false gospel. The Philippian church is definitely one of the best churches in the Bible, but even they had their problems. They had some women who couldn't get along, so that Paul had to ask a third-party to step in. The churches in Colossae and Thessalonica were falling for bad doctrine. There were all kinds of leadership problems that Paul had to address with Timothy and Titus. The author of Hebrews wrote to people who should have been teachers by then but were still immature and were on the verge of falling away from the faith. James wrote to churches that were plagued with fighting, quarreling, envy, selfishness, favoritism, and pride. Peter wrote to churches where the elders needed to be told not to lord it over the people, and not to be greedy for money, and not to serve under compulsion. Peter and Jude both had to deal with false teachers. John wrote to people who were buying in to Gnosticism. And then you have the seven churches in Asia Minor, which are presented as samples of what churches are like throughout the entire church age. And of those seven churches, five are rebuked by Jesus for some very serious sins. To the church in Ephesus Jesus said:

**Revelation 2:4 I hold this against you: You have forsaken your first love.**

That's pretty bad – forsake the greatest commandment. Then there's Pergamum and Thyatira. Both those churches were allowing false teachers to promote sexual immorality in the church. In Thyatira it also involved idolatry and occultic practices. Then there is the worst one of all - Laodicea. Jesus has no

praise at all for them. He just tells them that they make Him nauseous and He is about to vomit them out of His mouth.

### **Revelation 3:17 ...you do not realize that you are wretched, pitiful, poor, blind and naked.**

Lots of sin problems in most churches.

And even the churches that don't have major sin problems still have other serious problems. The two churches that Jesus has no rebuke for still had trouble - persecution, controversy, poverty, imprisonment... Every church has problems. Sometimes people have this idyllic conception of the early church in New Testament times. They are always saying, "We need to get back to the New Testament church." I hear that and think, "Which one?" Corinth? Galatia? Laodicea? Which set of problems do you want to go back to? Every church, including the ones in the book of Acts and in the rest of the New Testament, had problems. If you think you came from a church that didn't have many problems, it is more likely that you just didn't know about the problems.

So that is point #1 that the New Testament teaches on this topic of how to deal with problems in the church - expect them. If you see problems in the church, it doesn't necessarily mean that church has lost God's blessing. It doesn't mean you need to panic. It doesn't mean all is lost. It is not something you have to be afraid of.

## **Redeem It**

So, principle #1 in dealing with trouble in the church - expect it. Principle #2 - redeem it. If there is a problem, fix it.

## **The Seven Churches**

What did Jesus say to those terrible churches in Revelation 2 and 3? Did He say, "You people are hopeless - just shut the doors already"? He didn't say that to any of them - not even the worst one (Laodicea). Jesus didn't pull any punches when it came to rebuking those churches. But as bad as they were, He didn't give up on any of them. In fact, He actually praised most of them! He rebuked them for their sins, but He also praised six out of the seven for what they were doing right. We have a tendency to over-simplify things. We want simple labels - "bad church" or "good church." And once we judge a church (or a person) to be bad, we write them off and ignore the good. Jesus didn't do that. Out of seven churches, five were bad and six were good. How can that be? Jesus does not write off what is good because of what is bad. Nor does He ignore what's bad because of what's good. He praises the good and rebukes the bad.

And not only that, but He offers to restore the bad. Every one of those churches - He showed them the way to restoration. Where there was sin, He called them to repentance and made glorious promises to them if they repented. Even Laodicea - the one church He found nothing good in - even that church, Jesus hadn't given up on them. He showed them the way to repentance and restoration - and you can tell He genuinely desired that.

**Revelation 3:18 I counsel you to buy from me gold refined in the fire, so you can become rich; and white clothes to wear, so you can cover your shameful nakedness; and salve to put on your eyes, so you can see.**

Now listen to what He says next.

**19 Those whom I love I rebuke and discipline. So be earnest, and repent. 20 Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with him, and he with me. 21 To him who overcomes, I will give the right to sit with me on my throne, just as I overcame and sat down with my Father on his throne.**

Do you have that kind of attitude when you rebuke someone? Even that horrible church, Jesus still loved. *He loved them*. It is the only church where He invites them to come in and sit down and eat with Him. He offers them a chance to sit with him on His throne! Why? Because he is the Redeemer. He is the Messiah, which means His job description on earth is redemption and restoration and reclamation of what is broken. And we are to join Him in that work.

## Disposable Church

So how do you handle problems in the church? First, expect them, and second, fix them. Be an instrument of redemption in His hands. That might sound obvious, but the reality is we live in the day of the disposable church. Your church has a problem, just cast it aside and move on. Same thing with people. If a person has a problem, just toss him aside and move on to someone who doesn't have so many problems.

All too often there seems to be an underlying attitude that deep, serious problems cannot really be fixed. We rely on our human wisdom and our own strength, and in our wisdom and strength there is no way a really messed up church, or a really messed up person can be fixed. And so the passive types will tend to just leave and try to find a church that doesn't have any major problems. The more aggressive types will declare war on the person rather than the problem. They just want to get rid of the people that they see as causing the problems. If they do church discipline, their goal isn't to restore the person – their goal is to get rid of the person. Or to punish the person. Or in some cases they think they need to do God a favor by bringing down the whole church.

There's a whole range of different ways it might be expressed, but the underlying attitude is to discard or avoid problems rather than fixing them. There have been times that I have been guilty of that when it comes to evaluating potential leaders.

"You're not qualified on this point. Next, please!"

And someone had to take me aside and say, "Darrell, if someone is falling short on a certain point, *help them!* The goal isn't to disqualify them; the goal is to get them qualified." That is why when we refer to the Matthew 18 process around here, instead of calling it church discipline, we call it the restoration process. Because the goal isn't to discipline or punish or excommunicate people; the goal is to bring sinners to repentance and restore them. How does your Bible read in Galatians 6:1? Does your Bible say, "If someone is caught in a sin you who are spiritual should discard him"? Does it say, "If someone is

caught in a sin you who are spiritual should ignore him"?

"... you who are spiritual should gossip about him"?

"... you who are spiritual should shame him"?

Here's what it says in my Bible:

**Galatians 6:1 Brothers, if someone is caught in a sin, you who are spiritual should restore him gently.**

God created the world. It was ruined by sin. Now God is in the process of redeeming and restoring it, and we are tools in His hand to carry out that work.

And the same principle applies to churches. If you see a problem in this church family, do the same thing you would do if you saw a problem in your family at home – fix it. You are a tool in the Redeemer's hand.

Is there a point where you have to part ways? Yes. If you have made every effort to redeem the situation, but the person won't listen, or remains unrepentant, or you are just at an impasse on some major doctrinal issue, it might be time to move on. But that should never be our default. Our default should be to restore, restore, restore. That was Jesus' attitude toward a church with problems, and it should be our attitude because we are instruments in His redeeming hands. If you are a fireman, you run toward fires, not away from them. A fireman doesn't say, "I'm thinking of moving to another city."

"Why?"

"Because this city has too many fires. Something is wrong with this place."

He may be right – something may be wrong with that city, but firemen exist to go to where there are fires and to put them out. No doctor would say, “I’m going to try to find another hospital. There are just too many sick people here.” No contractor would say, “This job site has too many boards that need to be cut – too many nails that need to be driven. I’m going to try to find a house that’s already built.” We are called the body of Christ because we are here to do His work. And His work is the work of redemption - restoring what is ruined. And that work requires every one of us doing our part.

**Ephesians 4:16 From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work.**

You are a fireman. You are a doctor in the hospital. You are a contractor at the job site. If you don’t think God wants you to stay here and do the hard work, that’s fine. He might be calling you to go somewhere else and do the hard work. But I hope you don’t leave here so that you can try to find a church where no hard work needs to be done. If you find a church without any serious problems, be careful, because it might not be a church. Or it might be a church that is so adept at hiding its problems that you can’t see them.

## Apply Grace

So, how do we handle problems in the church? First, expect them. Second, fix them.

“How am I supposed to do that? I don’t have any power. I’m nobody.”

If that’s what you are thinking, you are off-track because you are relying on your own strength. Of course you don’t have the power to fix the problems in the church. If a person is caught in a sin, you don’t have the power, in your own strength, to restore that person. But there is something you have access to that does have enough power, namely, grace. If you want to fix a problem in a church, or in a person, or in a family, the way to do it is to apply grace.

## Grace is Power

Now, before I show you that in God’s Word, let’s make sure we have a good understanding of what grace is. I think most people have a misunderstanding of the meaning of grace. Very often people think of grace as another word for just cutting someone some slack.

“I know he messed up and deserves to be punished, but I’m going to show him some grace and let it slide.”

That is not what grace means. It doesn’t mean to cut someone some slack or to let something slide. The literal meaning of the Greek word is gift – that is the root idea of the word. When God gives you grace, He is actually giving you something. And many, many times in the New Testament that thing He is giving you has to do with power. Grace is the TNT of the New Testament. It is the nuclear power plant of the Christian life.

**1 Corinthians 15:10 ...his grace to me was not without effect. No, I worked harder than all of them—yet not I, but the grace of God that was with me.**

When a Christian receives grace from God, that is like Popeye eating spinach. It gives you power to be able to accomplish the work of God.

**2 Corinthians 9:8 And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work.**

**2 Timothy 2:1 You then, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus.**

**2 Corinthians 12:9 But he said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.”**

When God calls us to do something that we are incapable of doing because we are too weak and powerless, we need His grace to get it done.

## **Our Greatest Need**

Suppose you could get all the apostles in a room together in the first century, and you ask them, “If you could wish one thing for our church, what would you ask for?” They would say, “That’s easy – grace!” Almost every book in the New Testament begins *and ends* with some form of the statement, “Grace to you.” That is true of Paul’s books, Peter, James, Hebrews – even Revelation.

### **Revelation 1:4 Grace and peace to you...**

Then skip to the end, and these are the very last words in the whole Bible:

### **Revelation 22:21 The grace of the Lord Jesus be with God's people. Amen.**

They started and ended their letters asking for grace for the churches, because the apostles understood that is what churches need above anything else.

“Okay, this church needs grace – I get that. But what does that have to do with me? Isn’t God the one who is in charge of dispensing grace?”

What if I told you that God delegated that responsibility? What if I told you that He took His grace – the grace that this church needs, and He entrusted it to someone in this room and said, “It is your responsibility to distribute this grace here at Agape”? That did happen. And the name of that person who is in charge of distributing that grace happens to be written on your birth certificate.

### **1 Peter 4:10 Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others, faithfully administering God’s grace in its various forms.**

Literally it says, “**as good stewards of God’s multifaceted grace.**” You serve the body with your spiritual gift, and the church gets grace – supernatural, explosive, divine power from heaven to fix what’s wrong in the church.

## **Causes of Problems**

What causes problems in the church? Most of them are caused by people not getting something they want.

### **James 4:1 What causes fights and quarrels among you? Don’t they come from your desires that battle within you? 2 You want something, but you don’t get it.**

Other problems are caused by poor leadership, unrepentant sin, assuming motives, unforgiveness, poor communication, persecution, satanic attacks, bad doctrine – all kinds of sources. But no matter what the cause, in every church problem one thing we know for sure is that God is testing us.

### **Revelation 2:10 Do not be afraid of what you are about to suffer. I tell you, the devil will put some of you in prison to test you, and you will suffer persecution for ten days. Be faithful, even to the point of death, and I will give you the crown of life.**

We learned that when we were in James 1 - all the trouble we face in life is a test. Whether it be trouble from persecution, trouble from sin, consequences of our own foolishness, natural disasters – every kind of hardship is a test, designed to expose areas where our faith is strong or weak.

## **Grow from It**

And not only does trouble expose our faith – it strengthens it. It is one of the chief ways we make spiritual progress. Which brings us to the third observation about how to handle troubles in church.

- Expect it
- Fix it
- Grow from it

God allows hardship in His church for the same reasons He allows it in our lives. We need hardship to grow. We need it to learn perseverance. We need it to learn patience. We need it to learn faith.

There are all kinds of ways that the Lord strengthens and purifies His church through hardships. Do you realize that God allowed the troubles of the last three years to hit this church because His design is to use those to make us a better church? He is purifying His bride. There is a great statement in the book *Redeeming Church Conflicts*: “God has something bigger and better for us than just surviving church conflict or making it go away.”<sup>1</sup> That statement stopped me in my tracks. Whenever there is a problem in the church, I get so focused on making it go away that I am at risk of forgetting that God has purposes in allowing those conflicts. Maybe it is not going away until I learn what I need to learn. They go on to say this: “God is more concerned about what is going on in the heart of each person involved than about who will win or lose any particular debate or battle. ... When we not only redeem our church conflicts but also live as peacemakers in the turmoil of church conflict, we are working with the Holy Spirit and living as sanctified instruments for noble purposes.” Sometimes God allows a problem in the church, and His concern is not for me to fix the problem – His purpose is for the problem to fix me. We don’t have to be afraid of hardship in the church. Fire can’t harm gold. It can only refine it. So when problems come, if it is something we can influence, we apply grace, and we strive to function as instruments of redemption. If it is something outside of your realm of influence, yield to God’s purposes and allow the hardship to conform you more closely to the image of the Lord Jesus Christ. If we do that, all the promises Jesus made to those seven churches will come true for us.

## Conclusion

In 586 BC the Babylonians sacked Jerusalem, destroyed the temple, and took most of the Jews into exile. Seventy years later they are released from captivity and they go back to Israel and start rebuilding the Temple. They worked really hard for about two years, finally got the foundation done, but then the work petered out – for two reasons.

- 1) There was a ton of opposition, and all the controversy finally got to be too much for them.
- 2) The people became focused on their own concerns.

They said, “We need to build our own homes, and take care of our own families, and so they put all their energy into that and they lost interest in working on God’s house. So the whole project stalled out for 16 years. At that point God sent a couple prophets (Haggai and Zechariah) to motivate the people to stop focusing only on their own homes, and to stop being afraid of all the opposition, and go back to working on God’s Temple.

And so they did. And that lasted a month, and then they get discouraged. They are discouraged because some of them are old enough to remember the glory days of Solomon’s Temple.

**Haggai 2:3 Who of you is left who saw this house in its former glory? How does it look to you now? Does it not seem to you like nothing?**

Solomon’s Temple was one of the most glorious structures in the world. And the people look at their little, lame effort and they think, “This is a joke. We can’t match the glory of Solomon’s temple. We’re wasting our time. Better to have the beauty of a great memory than a cheap imitation.” And so their hands become slack in the work.

Does that sound like anything in your experience? John Piper: “I think anybody who has ever undertaken a work for the cause of Christ has felt that kind of discouragement: the sense that you work and work and the product seems so paltry. You pour yourself into a thing week after week and month after month and the fruit is so minimal. Then you look back in history or across town and see the grand

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<sup>1</sup> Redeeming Church Conflict, p.113.



achievement of others, and your temple seems so trivial. And you get discouraged and are tempted to quit and put away your aspirations and drop your dreams and put your feet up in front of the television and coast. Who wants to devote his life to a second-rate temple?"

That is significant for us at Agape at this time. Those of you who have been around a while can remember our glory days – those first five years. You remember when we were bursting at the seams, and there were no major controversies, and everything was just clicking along. And you look at how things are now, and you look at your little effort to try to fix things that are broken and you think, "It's a lost cause. What can I do? All I do is make the little cookie packets for visitors, or clean up after communion. I don't have any power to bring about any real change. If I were an elder or deacon, that would be one thing, but what effect can I have with my little portion of grace God has entrusted to me?"

The answer is, you can't do anything, but that little portion of grace can do mighty things! Look at what Haggai told those people who were discouraged because they didn't think their little effort could ever amount to anything.

**Haggai 2:4 But now be strong, O Zerubbabel,' declares the LORD. 'Be strong, O Joshua son of Jehozadak, the high priest. Be strong, all you people of the land,' declares the LORD, 'and work. For I am with you,' declares the LORD Almighty. 5 'This is what I covenanted with you when you came out of Egypt. And my Spirit remains among you. Do not fear.'**<sup>2</sup>

The reason why they should snap out of their weakness and lay aside fear, and roll up their sleeves and work is because God was with them – just as He promised. The courage and strength and motivation to continue on in a difficult work don't come from the forecasts of our human wisdom. It comes from whether or not God is with us. This church was never going to flourish because of our strength. An endeavor will work or not work based on whether or not the Lord is with us. And what did Jesus say?

**Matthew 28:20 ...surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.**

Jesus promised to be with His church. We don't have to be afraid, and we don't have to be discouraged or disheartened, because the glorious Lord Jesus Christ, King of the universe, is with us. And He will be with us until the very end of the age.

If Jesus Christ is with you, by your side, doing this work with you – are you going to say that this work is unimportant? Does God involve Himself with useless, trivial wastes of time? No – if He is with us in this, then this work is important.

That was one reason Haggai gave the people for why they shouldn't get discouraged. A second reason starts in verse 6.

**Haggai 2:6 "This is what the LORD Almighty says: 'In a little while I will once more shake the heavens and the earth ... 7 ...I will fill this house with glory,' says the LORD Almighty. 8 'The silver is mine and the gold is mine,' declares the LORD Almighty. 9 'The glory of this present house will be greater than the glory of the former house,' says the LORD Almighty.**

In other words, take courage, work, and fear not, because you build more than you see. All you see is some lame effort that is decidedly unimpressive. But God promises to take your work, fill it with his glory, and make your labors with a million times more than you ever imagined. That is what He promised to those people back then; does that promise apply in our situation? Our situation is the fulfillment of that promise! In what way did God make the temple more glorious than Solomon's old temple? He did it by allowing that building to be crushed to pieces and then raising up a new, spiritual temple, which is the church. John Piper: There is a principle here that applies to you and me: God takes small, imperfect things and builds them into a habitation for his glory. O, how we should take courage in our little spheres of

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<sup>2</sup> That is exactly the same encouragement that David had to give Solomon back when Solomon started building his Temple. **1 Chronicles 28:20 David also said to Solomon his son, "Be strong and courageous, and do the work. Do not be afraid or discouraged, for the LORD God, my God, is with you. He will not fail you or forsake you until all the work for the service of the temple of the LORD is finished.**

influence! ... Nothing you do is a trifle if you do it in the name of God. He will shake heaven and earth to fill your labor with splendor. Take courage, you build more than you see.

So what sort of future prospects do we have in the church?

**Matthew 16:18 ... I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it.**

When you hear that voice that says, “This work you’re doing is hopeless. You might as well just quit,” does that sound to you like the voice of God? When you read through Scripture, do you find God routinely saying that to His people when things get difficult?

“Just give it up. Nothing is ever going to come of this – just do everyone a favor and quit.”

Is that the sort of thing God typically says? Or you find him more often saying things like, “Stop getting discouraged and get back to the task I called you to. Persevere. Endure hardship. Don’t give up. Remain faithful.” Has it been hard? Yes, but we have not yet resisted to the point of shedding our blood. Are times of refreshment around the corner in this church? I hope so, and we can certainly pray for that. But in the meantime, we persevere. Is three years a long time to persevere? It feels like it, but long time or short, He calls us to remain faithful, and to stand strong, and not give up - for how long? For as long as He is with us. And how long is that? Until the very end of the age.

**1 Corinthians 1:8 He will keep you strong to the end**

**Benediction: Isaiah 43:1-4 But now, this is what the LORD says-- he who created you...he who formed you: "Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have summoned you by name; you are mine. 2 When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and when you pass through the rivers, they will not sweep over you. When you walk through the fire, you will not be burned; the flames will not set you ablaze. 3 For I am the LORD, your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Savior... 4 Since you are precious and honored in my sight, and because I love you**

## **Application Questions (James 1:25)**

1. What are some forms of grace that you are able to distribute in this church (through your gifts, abilities, etc.)?
2. How well do you think you’re doing at that?
3. Describe a problem in the present or recent past that you may not have been seeing as an opportunity for spiritual growth. Discuss with the group how you could grow spiritually as a result of that trouble.