

The Spiritual Work of Building a Church

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Date: 18 March 2012

[0:00] 1 Corinthians 3, from 1 to 15.

1 Corinthians 3, Paul writes, And I, brethren, could not speak unto you, as unto spiritual, but as unto carnal, even as unto babes in Christ.

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And yet Paul addresses these folk in Corinth and he says, Brethren, I couldn't speak to you as unto spiritual, but as unto carnal. Fleshly people, even as unto babes in Christ.

Paul contrasts the carnal with the spiritual. He did not hold back. He gave them both barrels. He says, I tell you the truth, you're not growing up.

[3:15] You're not growing. He saw the Corinthians as carnal, not as spiritual. He saw them as needing to grow, yet being babes still. He says, I fed you with milk and not with meat, for you're not able to bear the meat.

Neither yet now are you able, for you are yet carnal. Talked about the ending, strides and divisions. Corinth was in a bit of a mess, as we know through the book. We're seeing all kinds of spiritual issues and conflict and confusion.

The church was torn and divided. He goes on, verse 4 and 5. He says, some of you are saying, I'm of Paul. I'm of Apollos. There was this kind of division going about the church.

And Paul was saying to them, look, you're not spiritual. You're not growing in your faith. You're spiritually retarded. Will you be a vessel unto honour or unto dishonour?

The question for all of us is, how are we building? How are you building? In your life? How are we building as a church together? To be that assembly of God's people, glorifying Him.

[4:22] Paul shows us how to build. He shows us how to build. He gives credit to God's power. In verse 6, we see, Paul gives credit, number one, to the divine agency.

The divine agency. He says in verse 6, I have planted, Apollos has watered, but God gave the increase. God is the key to growth.

He is the key to the growth of our fellowship, to the growth of our own individual Christian lives. God gives the increase. It is unto Him. It is by Him. It is for Him.

We must do things God's way as a church. And God helping us, we prayerfully seek His face. We seek His will. We seek earnestly that we obey the Scriptures and follow His will as outlined therein.

It's not of Apollos or of Paul, but the increases of God. It's God's doing. We must have His power, His doing, His divine agency.

[5:28] The divine agent, the Holy Spirit. As we read in Zechariah 4, verse 6, that familiar passage, it is not by might, nor by power, not by human effort or fleshly skill, but by my Spirit, saith the Lord of hosts.

Revival is His. The glory is His. And unto Him be glory in the church. That's the ultimate, the divine agency, God's power, by His Holy Spirit.

We want to see that evident in our church, to see the Holy Spirit evident as we're truly living God-glorifying lives individually and as a body. That we're constantly relying upon that divine

agency, the divine agent, the Holy Spirit, trusting in His constant aid, the agency of the Spirit of God.

So verse 7, 1 Corinthians 3, So then neither is He that planteth anything, neither He that watereth, but God, but God, that giveth the increase.

It says that then of those who water, those who plant, they shall receive a reward. God recognises human labour. He recognises human labour, but our faith is not based upon labour or our heavenly reward of itself is not founded upon human labour.

[6:51] But there are works here below that are recognised in the hereafter. That's something that we should take note of. Every one of us here today you're building something now that can be praised in the hereafter.

You're building something now that can be recognised and rewarded before God at the end of the days. Verse 9, it says, For we are labourers together with God.

Ye are God's husbandry, or if you like, God's field. Ye are God's building. It's important to note, we're co-workers with God. We're co-workers.

We're labourers together with God. We're labourers together with God. The church is God's idea, and it must be led in harness with Him. It must be led in God's way.

It must be led in harness with God. For we, the church, the church body, we are labourers together with God.

[7:56] You are God's field. You are God's building. Think of that. The church has a picture, just in those two pictures, a field, a building, a building.

As a field, we're of God's planting, and of His cultivation. He is the farmer, the husbandman, the farmer who labours over us, and the church is His building.

As we as living stones, as lively stones, are built together of God's construction, we are God's construction project. And it's happening today, isn't it, still? I know I've seen some Christians with a bumper sticker that they're still under construction, this is a work in progress.

You know, we're all, none of us have arrived yet. Certainly not this one here. We're a building project that is still under construction. And Paul goes on in verse 10, 1 Corinthians 3, According to the grace of God which is given unto me as a wise master builder, I have laid the foundation, and another buildeth thereupon.

But let every man take heed how he buildeth thereupon. Take heed how you build. It's telling us here, friends, believers here tonight, take heed.

[9:07] He says, pay attention here, take a note of this, how are you building. Take note of how you're building. Take heed of this. It must be in accord with God's divine authority, the Word of God.

And the foundation, the foundation, must be squarely Christ, the Lord. Christ is the foundation, the Word of God. as we read of the story of the parable of the man who built his house on the sand, the man who built his house on the rock.

The rock was the Word of the Lord. And that was a secure foundation. That was a secure building. But the sandy foundation would not stand.

And so our foundation must be squarely Christ, our Lord. So, number one, in building the church, we need the divine agency. The divine agency or the divine power, if you like.

It must be through him and to him and unto him, by him and for him. and the increase will be because of him, the divine agency.

[10:11] Secondly, Paul goes on to give credit to the divine authority, the divine authority that underpins the church of the living God. Verse 11, it says, For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ.

You know, friends, we would be asked, by whose authority are we a church? It's by his authority.

It's because he said, I will build my church and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.

We see the church through history has been through all kinds of turmoil and confusion and I believe it still is happening today. We see the dark ages. You know, I've heard it said we could perhaps use the label of Protestant but in fact, one could say that Baptists actually were never Protestants.

We were right through from the beginning. We weren't part of the apostate Roman Catholic system to be such that would object and protest as such. The remnant church always existed through history as those believers that took the word of God seriously.

They weren't into the sacramental systems and all the pageantry and the idolatry of the dark ages churches of the Roman Catholic apostate system.

[11:31] But the true church of God is and always has been in existence in some form or fashion and thank God for the Reformation where many other saints left the false system of the day and the papal regime.

But friends, we've got a divine authority, the word of God and that foundation upon which we are built as a church. We're not a cult. We're not some kind of group that says we're it and everybody else is wrong.

There's many churches as I said earlier today that are like-minded with us and we fellowship with those churches. We fellowship with certainly over a hundred, certainly more than probably a couple of hundred churches around Australia that are like-minded with us, standing on the authority who is the foundation, our Lord Jesus Christ.

And certainly there's much more saints in churches all over of many persuasions and we thank God for believers worldwide who may not entirely be in our frame of thinking and yet are saved by the blood of Christ.

And we thank God that in all colours of denominations there are such. But as a church we want to have a foundation that is sure and steadfast, not deviating, not swept aside, not confused with error, but as God helping us as squarely as we can be based on that foundation.

[12:54] That's what we want. That's what we urge one another to be and urge me to be that if you see some fault that I need correction. We want to be based on that foundation, the divine authority and that underlies our labours, our desires, our aspirations.

It's Christ, Christ in Him crucified. It's the gospel message, the power of God unto salvation to everyone who believes, Jew or Gentile.

It's Christ our Lord, the foundation. It's the life-changing message of the gospel and it must be preached soundly and squarely, the life-changing message, the message of conversion, the message of the new birth.

This is not just some feel-good kind of happy-clappy, take-it-or-leave-it thing. It's a life-changing message. That is what we stand upon, the message of Christ and Him crucified.

Our philosophy of ministry is not as some would be, let me entertain you. Amen. But it is the faithful preaching of the Word of God as there's others, not just me, but others in this fellowship who will faithfully proclaim it and stand upon it.

[14:01] That's what we must depend upon, the divine authority, the divine authority. Sadly, I see that lacking in many quarters. It is lacking. Friends, let's be honest.

It's lacking in many quarters because they've got to stray from the Word of God and it's going to the next level, as you could say. Some like to use that thing as if you're somehow progressing.

We're going to go to the next level as if our church is suddenly going to be somehow super-duper and even more super-duper. But they're going to the next level, all right. Down, down, down, down, down.

A downward slide into apostasy. We need the divine authority. Friends, it's vital, it's critical, it's upon that that we must depend. It's our Lord who says, without me, you can do nothing.

John 15, verse 5, without me, you can do nothing. Friends, we need to be firmly and squarely planted on Christ and not swerving away and to be dependent upon Him, to be a praying church, a church that prays, a church that stands together in studying fellowship and to look for strength and help to Him.

[15:08] Verse 12, it goes on, of the building process. He says here in 1 Corinthians 3, 12, Now if any man build upon this foundation gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, stubble.

Fact is, you are building. You are building every single one of you. There's something that you're building now that will see something in store beyond.

For some, it's gold. For some, it's silver. Some precious stones. For some, wood, hay, stubble.

What does that mean? Gold. Gold in the word in 1 Peter 1, verse 7, speaks of the trial of your faith. Being much more precious than of gold.

That parish, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honour and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ. The trial of your faith. It's going to be gold quality.

[16:10] In Psalm 66, verse 10, the psalmist cried, for thou, O God, has proved us, thou hast tried us as silver is tried. Silver, that is tried.

Silver, that's been through the fire, that's been through the furnace, that's been molted, and the impurities have been taken. A picture there of gold, silver quality faith, of precious stones.

Again, something that's very strong and rugged and has a quality, a quality to it. Throughout our lives we are building.

Brethren, you are building. Brother, sister, you are building. Let it not be that which is in vain. Not useless things that can take up our time, our energy, our resources, that will think, what a waste! What a waste of work, the hay, the struggle. For some, they'll stand before him and as someone has put it, they'll have just a pile of ashes when the fire comes.

[17:11] A pile of smouldering ashes as the word hay and stubble will perish. Let it not be in vain, brother. Let it not be in vain how you spend your life.

Not word, hay, stubble, empty, dead, worthless, shallow things, wasted works, wasted time, idle pursuits. Let's invest our lives in that which matters.

To build those building blocks that will stand the test of eternity. There'll be something in eternity to show for the lifetime you've lived, for your humanity on this planet.

Yet for some, there'll be the shabby things, shabby things, valueless things, unworthy of him. Will the works that we do be those that are spirit-led, that are of value in eternity, that are based on God's word and truth.

That we've been faithful to the message that is given to us to communicate. In John 6, 63, it says, the flesh profits nothing. The flesh profits nothing.

[18:20] It's not of our own working, but of his empowering, of his enabling. What kind of workman are you? What kind of builder are you in your life? Friends, I urge you to consider that question.

A preacher of old, Bob Jones Sr. said, it's always a sin to do less than your best. I know some of you do put in the hard yards. There's some that have been of great help to this church in many practical ways.

We could name them, but if I thank you now, you might get your thanks later. It says, in a way, it does say, doesn't it, that we don't want praise of men.

It's unto him, it's unto him. But we do such things. We want to give him our best, not less than our best. What motivates you to serve God? Not someone patting you on the back. In a way, it's probably a good thing if someone starts to criticise you.

I've had some criticism this afternoon, as I mentioned before, from some dear people in my life, saying I'm a crackpot.

[19:26] Maybe I am. I want to be a crackpot for Christ. That's what I want to be. That's what I must be. That's what we all need to be. Friends, that's what matters. It's what matters is what's eternal, not what is earthly and vain.

And to serve him, not out of a love for praise of men, or someone to command us, or someone to acknowledge us, but for God to acknowledge us.

For him to say, well done, that good and faithful servant when the time comes. And it's out of that love, that desire to please him. Without faith it is impossible to please God. Let your serving be in faith.

Serve him with faith. Serve him through the power of his Holy Spirit. Serve him in biblical truth with a devout love for God. In Hebrews 6 verse 10 it tells us of love.

It says of laboring for the Lord, our purest motive is love. In Hebrews 6 verse 10 it says, True ministry is rooted in a true love for God.

[20:35] It's a love for God, it's a love for others, a labor of love. It's a labor of love, we're not in it for the praise of men, we're not in it for earthly recognition or any kind of advantage we can gain to

ourselves.

The motive is love, it's his love, and his love for others. So we see a divine agency, it's his increase, it's his empowering, a divine authority, it's Christ our foundation stone.

And we see thirdly a divine accountability, a divine accountability. Friends, your work is going to be tried, it's going to be tried, what you do is going to be tried, it's going to be fired, it's going to be tested, it's going to face the flame.

In verse 13, every man's work shall be made manifest, for the day shall declare it because it shall be revealed by fire, and the fire shall try every man's work of what sort it is.

If any man's work abide which he hath built thereupon, he shall receive a reward. If any man's work shall be burnt, he shall suffer loss, but he himself shall be saved yet so as by fire.

[21:41] Some are going to be saved yet so as by fire. It's got the picture of they're going to be saved by the skin of their teeth. They're just going to make it. They're just going to get over the line.

And for some, the judgment seat of Christ will be a time of where there's a degree of embarrassment. embarrassment, I'll put it to you, what will we have left to show for our life? Will our life have been a spiritual work? And friends, this is not to condemn or heap burdens on your back, but to challenge you, to urge you as a fellow brother or a fellow sister to provoke you unto love and to good works, knowing that you can do something for the kingdom of God.

You can do something for the kingdom and you can do a work that won't be wasted. God will apply the blowtorch.

The blowtorch will be heated up and those works that you have done will be tested by fire. Our works will be tested not for the quantity of them, not for the popularity of them, but the quality of them, the quality of our work.

[22:53] In Ephesians 2.10 it says, For we are his workmanship created in Christ Jesus unto good works which God hath also before ordained that we should walk in them.

Will our work abide when the time of judgment arrives? Friends, I don't want to be fooling around with the things of God. They're too holy, they're too precious, they're too important, that this holy work will be engaged in carelessly or by my own effort alone, but by heeding the spirit of God, by a receptivity to the Holy Spirit and God forbid, God forbid, woe to me if I would do anything to grieve the Holy Spirit.

We want to be very sensitive to the Holy Spirit and how do we know what he wants? It's here, he's written it for us in black and white and red sometimes.

Our God's truth is that which guides our way, our sure foundation, we must be obedient to the word. There's a time of judgment you will face, you will face it.

Everything will be called into question, everything, everyone will be brought into account. Now friends, there's two kind of judgments in the word. There's the judgment for the lost, there's the judgment for the saved.

[24:17] How will you answer? How will you give account? What is it that has governed you and directed your life? Will the building effort you have made stand the test?

When the day of judgment reveals the quality of your building product. You know, we see this building, it's not that old, it's already starting to crack up. You know, the building product, we can see, if you start looking too close, you'll start to see all the defects.

It's a bit like the hymn book about this imperfect person put together. You see all the faults and failings and all those faults and failings of every one of our lives, we will be made public, we will be made open for the world to see.

The secret things, the day of judgment will reveal. Friends, we want to be about the spiritual work that God has called us to be. Every one of us, individually, as fathers and mothers, as children, as families, as men, as women, as a church body.

So being a spiritual work, that's what we seek after. The true church of God is a spiritual work and we shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ. Romans 14 verse 10.

[25:26] Will we have what is of eternal value? Think of it. You will have your day in the Supreme Court. Not just some so-called Supreme Court down here in some city of our nation, but the Supreme Court.

Not the United Nations Supreme Court, but the Supreme Court. you will have your day there and you will stand there with nothing really much to say for yourself other than the blood that is your entry pass.

But thank God there will be something of your life that will be evidenced there. Let it not be with embarrassment or facing loss. Notice here, as someone put it, no one goes to hell at the judgment seat of Christ.

You know, the Romans 14.10, the judgment seat of Christ. It's for believers. It's for believers. It's the same judgment we are indicating here in 1 Corinthians 3.

It's the judgment for the saved. It's the judgment of works, where people sown will lose rewards, but they are still saved. You know, thank God for that.

[26:36] Thank God for that, that even the most faulty Christian can be saved. Can be saved. If the most faulty Christian was trusting in any working on their own, then they haven't got the real thing.

They haven't got salvation by faith. But friends, it's like Lot, the righteous man Lot, in Genesis 20. He lost everything that he had, yet he himself was saved from the fiery destruction.

And the Lord said there's really two kinds of saints in the last days, those who are faithful like Noah and those who are slothful like Lot. One Christian will differ from another.

There's a testing going to happen. A testing will reveal the spiritual quality of what we've used in our building materials. Friends, here's a little quote. His plan for me, his plan for me, when I stand at the judgment seat of Christ, and he shows his plan for me, the plan of my life, as it might have been, he had his way.

And I see how I blocked him here, and checked him there, and I would not yield my will. Will there be grief in my Saviour's eyes, grief, though he loves me still?

[27:49] Would he have me rich, and I stand there poor, stripped of all but his grace, while memory runs like a hunted thing down the paths I cannot retrace? Lord of the years that are left to me, I give them to thy hand.

Take me and break me and mould me to the pattern that thou has planned. When I stand at the judgment seat of Christ, who knows when that will be? It could be sometime quite soon.

In the earthly scale of time, it is soon. It's just a hair's breadth away really, isn't it? In the scheme of eternity, gold, silver, precious stones, work, hay, stubble.

Some will have treasures, some will have trash, some will have ashes, some will have something lasting. So cast at his feet.

What will you have on that day? Eternal rewards? Will you have gold kind of faith? Job had that kind of faith. We think of man, of God, think of Job.

[28:48] They didn't have the prosperity gospel in his day. He was perfect, the Bible says. He was just, he was upright, and he went through the fire. He lost everything, everything, absolutely everything, precious to him, of earthly scents, all his possessions, but he said, though God slay me, yet will I trust him.

He had a gold kind of faith, a gold standard kind of faith. He says, I will come forth as pure gold.

Can that be said for you? I know we've had some minute measure of suffering in our lives.

I can think of my family minute suffering, nothing. I don't know if there's men of God here today who have seen much, much more in the countries they've come from of great suffering, of horrific things. Friends, yeah, gold faith, gold faith, faith that is pure, purified. I know Brother Ian with his passion for the persecuted church, and as Brother Phil mentioned this morning in the prayer time of gold standard faith, faith that goes through the fire, faith of men and women of God in India, in China, in the African countries, in the Middle Eastern areas.

Though he slay me, yeah, will I trust him? Gold, silver, precious stones. Job was refined. Now I'm not praying for it for myself, I'd rather not have too much of that come my way, but maybe it needs to, maybe it needs to, maybe it needs to get tougher, maybe it needs to get harder, maybe the fiery trial needs to get fired up a bit, maybe we need a bit more persecution, that the golden faith will shine through, that purified kind of faith, and as the preachers of old said, we must rematch tribulation into the kingdom of God.

[30:43] You know, someone said, I read earlier today, you can't use an egg unless it's broken, and sometimes it's like that with you and me.

Lord, use my brokenness, use my brokenness, are those times when you're flat, are those times when it's hard, it's hard to even praise him, you feel like you've lost your joy, you feel like things are tough, there's tough things going on in your family, in your life, those are the times that the gold will shine, those are the times the trial of your faith, it's not going to perish, it's going to stand the test, and friends, what kind of treasures are you laying up in heaven.

Again, not to claim credit, we're not preaching works here tonight, there's no way you can get to heaven by anything you can do, absolutely nothing, not one bit of what you can do, it's entirely of Christ, of his bleeding and dying and rising for you, of his body carrying your sin, nailed there, for your forgiveness, you must receive that, you must receive that, I urge you, if you haven't, to trust him now, and as you trust him, turning from sin, in faith to him, salvation is a purchased possession, it's present tense, saved, eternal life, now, you can know that, beyond a shadow of a doubt, you can know that you know that you know, you can know these things are written that you may know that you have, eternal life, you can know that today, if for you salvation is something, I think I'm saved, I hope I'm saved, I'm trying really, really, really hard to be saved, it's not the real thing, it's when you come to the realisation that you know, you know, someone testified this morning, of their salvation day, of that day when everything changed, of that day when a life was turned around, of that day when a man stepped from death into life, that's the conversion experience, and friends, then, there's the walk, then there's the sanctification, after the salvation, there's the sanctification, there's the walking with God, and the church of God, your life, it's a spiritual work, I urge you today, consider the building blocks you're placing into your life, think of the gifts that God has given to you, there's men and women here today, and I know I've talked on this line of recent days, your gifts just sitting on a dusty shelf somewhere, there's things you could be doing, volunteer, volunteer, tell someone you want to serve, show a willingness to serve, we'll find something for you to do, there's no lack of that, if God has equipped you to do something, if God has gifted you, we want to unleash that potential, we don't want to hold you back, we want to unleash that, and harness that for the kingdom of

God, so friends, to wrap up, it's a spiritual work, the kingdom of God, the church of the living God, your very life, it's a spiritual work that you're building, day by day by day, building blocks, number one, the divine agency, on that we must trust, his empowering, his increase, that when anything good happens in this church, glory to God, he gives the increase, it's despite me, it's despite any man, or any woman, to God be the glory, unto him be glory, in his church, God gives the increase, if this church grows, if there's some measure of blessing, if there's some revival, even in a fashion, it's to God be the glory, great things he has done, he brings the increase, the divine agency, the divine authority, on his word we build, on Christ the foundation, stone, the divine authority, that must underpin, everything we do, the divine accountability, the judgment seat of Christ, you're all going to give account, every single one, this man, this black duck here is going to give account, and it says it's heavier on me, it's heavier, and friends, I'd urge every one of you to consider your responsibility, the accountability before the judgment seat of Christ, build into your life gold, silver, precious stones, find something you can do, and do it with all your might to the glory of God.

[35:19] Let us pray.