

Demolish Self Sufficiency And Turn To Christ

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[0 : 00] God, as we have received the body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ, the sacrament of his death, which we are commanded to remember, so we ask that we may receive his living word and that it might bring life to our hearts, we ask in Jesus' name. Amen.

Amen. Well, now. The passage that I want to look at is Galatians 2, verse 15 to 21. It's found in your pew Bibles on page 177. And the particular verse which I want to focus on is verse 18.

But if I build up again that thing which I tore down, let me read that again. If I build up again those things which I tore down, then I prove myself a transgressor.

The way you build a church, the church of Jesus Christ, is by massive demolition. We had the wonderful picture in Vancouver, not these many weeks ago, when the first thing to happen on a Sunday morning, when the dawn was scarcely up, is that right in the heart of downtown Vancouver, a huge and magnificent building, I'll let you judge how magnificent, but there it was, right in the heart of downtown Vancouver, and within a matter of seconds it was totally demolished and in a pile on the ground.

[1 : 45] Now that essentially is what needs to happen to us as a congregation. It's what needs to happen to us as individuals. That on Sunday morning, the proud castle of our self-sufficiency would be dynamited and just come crashing down around our ears.

And we would see our total need for the grace of God in every aspect of our lives. I badly need a prayer book.

If you look in the prayer book, you'll see that when, on page 536, you'll see that this prayer has been with us from the beginning of our life in Christ.

Page 536, the demolition prayer, you might say. The demolition which is so necessary. Here it is. We pray for those coming to baptism. Cast out of their hearts. Do you see it? 536. Every evil imagination and everything which exalts itself against the knowledge of thee and bring every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ.

[3 : 04] The fact is that you have to cast down all those things in our hearts which build themselves up as the grounds and basis of our self-sufficiency.

And that's why what Paul is talking about in chapter 2, verse 15, Paul. I got that cough from going into hospital.

I didn't go into hospital because of that cough. I want you to know. That's just to keep you straight on it. What Paul is talking about here is being justified.

And if you look at chapter 2, verse 15, it says, we were Jews by birth and not Gentile sinners even though we were Jews.

Yet we knew that a man was not justified by works of the law. There is no proud castle of self-sufficiency that we can build that will justify us in the sight of God and before one another.

[4 : 14] It simply can't be done. That's what Paul is telling us. And that's why he says to us in verse 18, if I build up again those things which I torture, then I prove myself a transgressor.

What needs to happen is you need some kind of spiritual bulldozer that will come at you again and again and again and smash up all the structures of self-sufficiency which we build.

You see, what happens in our lives is this. I mean, it's very dangerous becoming a Christian. I mean, turning from a total secular materialist self-centered way of life to being a Christian because once you've done that you begin to feel a little better about yourself and then you start to build a little castle of self-sufficiency around your religion and when the burning passions of youth pass and they do, you might begin to feel better about yourself than when you were the victim of it.

When there's a little money in your bank account which there'd never been before, you might begin to feel a little deserving coming on. When you have the satisfaction of knowing that people think better than the truth about you, well then, that helps to give you a few building stones that you can work with.

When your memory fails a little and you find it hard to recall actually having broken any of the Ten Commandments, again you have wonderful building material there that you can build with.

[6 : 10] And all the time the temptation comes down on you to build and build and build. Once upon a time you were a sinner that needed to be saved but now indeed you are moral, you are upright, you are successful, you are well thought of, you are esteemed in your community, so why not build a little castle around that on which will be the basis of your justification before God and men.

Men will let you play that game because they're playing it themselves. And that's what happens. And that's why Paul says in verse 18, if I build up again those things which I tore down then I prove myself a transgressor.

Well, the fact is you may long for this thing, this righteousness with God and you may gather all the building material out of which you may think you can build yourself this castle of self-righteousness, this grounds on which you can build your own justification.

You may do it but you will never build anything but the meanest hovel imaginable. You'll never do it because righteousness is a characteristic of God.

And the only way you can have that is if he gives it to you. The great delusion of religion the world over is that somehow we can do it ourselves.

[7 : 55] And it doesn't work. You could read this passage from Galatians chapter 2 verse 15. We ourselves who are Anglicans by birth.

We have history. We have tradition. We have liturgy. We have music. We have architecture. We have form and substance to our worship.

All those things I count but dumb. They cannot build justification or righteousness into your life. that's only something God can give you. And that's why Paul is arguing with the Galatians and telling them do you understand this?

Let me give you this illustration. Just suppose and I'm not going to lay this on you as a model for your behavior because what I am supposing is quite impossible humanly speaking but the very fact of its impossibility humanly speaking must give us grounds to praise God even more.

[9 : 15] Imagine if you will a faithful wife completely faithful and a faithless husband completely unfaithful.

You got the picture? There she is and there he is. And she knows all about his unfaithfulness. Every act of his unfaithfulness is passed on to her.

Every event in which he's involved, everything she knows, everything that can be known about his unfaithfulness is known by her. And day by day breakfast is ready, supper is ready, the house is clean, the dishes are washed, the children are raised, all those things go on and on and on.

And he meantime is living this double life depending as it were on his wife who keeps the whole thing going and at the same time living a life of complete duplicity.

And not only is he living this life of complete duplicity, his wife knows all about it and he is so deceived that he doesn't even know she knows.

[10 : 28] And so it goes on month after month, maybe year after year if you want. And then he finds out that she's known all alone.

And as he looks over the record of their life together, he realizes that the only grounds on which he can continue to live his life is on the grounds that she will forgive him.

And that what he has done to preserve his home, his family, his reputation, all those things she has done for him.

what can he do? Well, he can break out in high indignation if he wants. He can storm off if he wants. But the only way that his life can go on is if he can accept from her the forgiveness which she is glad to offer to him.

[11 : 43] And if on the basis of that repentance and forgiveness she can go on, he can go on living in the enjoyment of all that she has won by her faithfulness, by her profound suffering, and by her willingness to hope for the future.

It's all dependent upon her. She has maintained her side of the covenant. God. Well, you see, that's the picture of who we are before God.

We have not got one shred of material left in our lives out of which to build anything. And the only way we can go on with our lives is as if we receive from God the forgiveness of our sins, if we receive from him that righteousness and that justification which is his and which he imparts to us, just as the man's place in the community is only his because his wife has kept it for him, and when he comes to realize it, can give it to him.

now supposing that that takes place, and supposing that the reconciliation is effective, and supposing that it goes on for a year or two, and supposing that things smooth over and the wounds begin to heal and things go back to a relatively normal state between these two people, and then supposing that he tries another time to be unfaithful.

Now that's what Paul means when he says in verse 18, if I build up again those things which are torn down, which I have torn down, then he says, I prove myself a transgressor.

[14:08] There's no further need for condemnation. You are destroyed because you've built again the thing which was torn down.

And you see, the difficulty for us as a congregation is that that is such a real temptation to us. Having established the fact that our relationship to God, our righteousness which is conferred on us by God himself and by God alone, that that has been given to us, what do we do?

well, we become respectable and we involve ourselves in good works and we do this and we do that and we become satisfied. No, we don't.

We demolish everything that stands in the way of the recognition of our total dependence upon the grace and mercy of God shown to us in Jesus Christ.

Everything that comes in the way of that, we destroy. We're going to dedicate a Norway maple after this service.

[15:28] We're going to dedicate a bird bath out in the garden of remembrance. We may be going to raise a million dollars to restore this church and renovate the hall as we voted at the vestry last Wednesday.

We may be going to do all those things. And because we are human and because we are prideful, we might say, well, doesn't that make us a wonderful congregation?

Aren't we the envy of all that behold us? No, we are not. Because if we build anything, on the basis of what we do and not on the basis of what he has done for us, then all we do is prove ourselves to be transgressors.

We are what we always wear and that is living in defiance of God. What a wonderful gift it is to us this morning that for the gospel reading, there is the lovely story of the prostitute who came in from the street with the ointment and wept and washed Christ's feet and dried them with her hair and anointed his feet and kissed his feet and did all those things.

and the Pharisee said, if he knew who that was, he wouldn't allow her to do it. Indeed, it was only because he knew who she was that he allowed her to do it.

[17:19] You see what I mean? For us as a congregation, we are allowed to do things like plant trees or beautify our property or restore or renovate.

We're allowed to do those things only because we are sinners who are overwhelmed by thankfulness to a God who has done for us in Christ what we could never do for ourselves.

And if we were to take those things and try and build from them a castle of our own self-sufficiency, how wrong that would be. how necessary, you see, it is for us as a congregation, for us as individuals, that we live in such relationship to our God in Christ by the Holy Spirit, that no edifice is allowed to be built, but as quickly as we try to put it together, it is demolished by the awareness that of our total dependence is upon the amazing grace of God shown to us in Jesus Christ.

That is the only basis on which we can live our lives. And we betray one another if we allow ourselves to do anything else.

we betray one another if we support ourselves in doing this, in thinking better than the truth of ourselves and not recognizing.

[19:12] Do you know, that's why, I mean, it's why Paul says, I'll quit, it's why Paul says in Philippians chapter 3 concerning his own life, he says this, if you're going to build a proud castle of self-sufficiency, that's how he begins verse 4 in a sense.

He says, if anybody thinks he has reason for such confidence in the flesh, I have more. I am circumcised on the eighth day of the people of Israel.

I am of the tribe of Benjamin who gave the first king to Israel. I am a Hebrew born of the Hebrews, a child of Abraham. As to the law, I am a Pharisee.

As to zeal, a persecutor of the church. As to righteousness which is under the law, I am blameless. but whatever gain I had, I count but dumb because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus, my Lord.

That's the only thing that can be at the center of our lives. as a congregation and as individuals. God grant that week by week as we come to the communion, the word of God may as a bulldozer push out of the way all our pride and self-sufficiency and bring us back to the awareness that who we are at the most basic level is who we are because of what?

[21 : 11] because of God's faithful covenant to us. That covenant which is fulfilled by the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. users Finally and Hilda Dampier celebrated their 50th wedding anniversary, I'd ask them to stand. Larry stands the whole time, so maybe Larry should sit. Is Hilda here as well? There's Hilda. I think... For those of you who don't know, Larry is center at the back there, with less hair than Jack. I do all this with a little trepidation after this sermon because I don't want to be responsible for helping to build up some sort of thing around you two after this wonderful 50 years of marriage that you think you might be able to be built up by this congregation.

[22 : 49] So take that with a grain of salt, those claps, please. Dear Lord, we, your people, pray for peace on earth and for the unity of all Christians.

For our missionaries, for those who have departed this life, and for Christ's Church militant. And today, Father, we pray particularly for our own congregation of St. John's.

Most of us, certainly me, Lord, are proud of our material possessions and accomplishments, and it seems difficult to really acknowledge to ourselves that these are gifts from you, and that we are to use and distribute these undeserved gifts, not for our glory, but for yours.

And Lord, at the Bestry meeting this week, we were reminded about sacrificial giving, that it might be good for each of us to ask you, Father, what should I give up so that your work can be carried further?

We all have our priorities, Lord, but what are your priorities for me, for each one of us at St. John's? I blindly and stubbornly hang on to my own priorities.

[24 : 06] Help me and help each one of us, Lord, to see your priorities for us, and help us to let go and to joyously give back to you. Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer.

And dear Father, you have blessed us at St. John's with inspired leadership in our worship of you, leaders in words and action and music. Yet we often seem to fret and fuss about unimportant mechanical details instead of rejoicing in your word and giving support to our leaders.

I pray, Lord, that we may grow in spirit and in love as a congregation. Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer. Father, the Task Force on Music at St. John's has asked the congregation to pray that you would give this task force both wisdom and your guidance for the report they will present later this month.

And I entreat, Lord, that we as a congregation may be enabled to be flexible and put our full support behind this report. Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer.

Father, our Sunday school is thriving and we give you thanks for the leadership. This is one of our most important activities, to teach our children about you, and we need more leaders to share in this rewarding work.

[25 : 25] So, Lord, we pray that many of us will be guided and encouraged to give to you in this way. Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer. And finally, Lord, help us to reach out to others, to comfort, to help, and to rejoice with those we meet in our daily lives.

Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer. Amen. Grant these requests, Father, for Jesus Christ's sake, our only mediator and advocate, to whom, with thee and the Holy Spirit, be all honor and glory. Amen.