

Church and Kingdom Part 2 - How to Build

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 28 February 2021

Preacher: Daniel Ralph

[0 : 00] focused on how to build, and this week it's a continuation on how to build and why we must build as a church. Teach me, O Lord, the way of your statutes, and I will keep it to the end.

Give me understanding that I may keep your law and observe it with my whole heart. Lead me in the path of your commandments, for I delight in it. Incline my heart to your testimonies and not to selfish gain. Turn my eyes from looking at worthless things and give me life in your ways. Confirm to your servant your promise that you may be feared. Turn away the reproach that I dread, for your rules are good. Behold, I long for your precepts in your righteousness. Give me life.

Well, let's come to our second hymn of this morning to turn to 1 Corinthians chapter 3. 1 Corinthians chapter 3.

Now, I do not have the benefit of the rustling of the leaves of the Bible to know when you have arrived there, so I'm just giving a few seconds, assuming that you are using an analog version of the Bible, a paper one, rather than a digital one. You'd be there in seconds. I no longer pray for your batteries to run out. I believe that you should be reading God's Word, whatever device it might be on.

Maybe. 1 Corinthians chapter 3. We're not going to read the entire chapter. I will bring in the entire chapter, but I really want us to focus on verses 10 through to 15. So chapter 10, sorry, verse 10 through to 15. So Paul is writing the letter to the Corinthian church. The Corinthian church is a divided church on a number of different issues, and they have to be instructed on a number of different issues as well. Everything from praying, serving, giving, marriage, family, children.

[2 : 32] There's not much that is not covered in this letter. And 1 Corinthians 3 is very much on the subject of how to build. And Paul, verse 10, according to the grace of God given to me, like a skilled master builder, I laid a foundation, and someone else is building upon it. Let each one take care of how he builds upon it. For no one can lay a foundation other than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. Now, if anyone builds on the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw, 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. If the work that anyone has built on the foundation survives, he will receive a reward. If anyone's work is burned up, he will suffer loss, though he himself will be saved, but only as through fire.

Well, as we come to the word of God this morning, I want to perhaps just highlight where we have been. So we spent four key weeks on the gospel in the kingdom, the cost and the priority of following the Lord Jesus Christ. And now we're moving into the church and the kingdom. And as we saw last week, the church and the kingdom are identical in some respects. Last week, we laid the foundation of the type of involvement that God's people are to have in a world that they're not part of.

The type of work that we are to be involved in, though we are kingdom people living in a fallen world. And this was illustrated by the disciples not having to pay the tax because they were sons of the kingdom, but they were to voluntarily engage in the conditions of the society that they lived in, in order to serve God. So they were not under obligation, but they were to voluntarily engage as servants and disciples of Jesus Christ.

And so we have this type of engagement in the world, which is motivated and shaped by our relationship with God, by the fact that we belong to the kingdom of God. And so we're able to make the very clear distinction between being able to render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and that's even the same today, and rendering to God that which belongs to God. Now we have to be able to recognize what belongs to Caesar, taxation, for instance, and what belongs to God, a person, for instance, so that we're able to make the distinction and therefore not render to one the other.

We must render to God that which belongs to God and render to Caesar that which belongs to Caesar. And we shouldn't be confused about that God doesn't want to receive our taxes. It's quite clear that God is not interested in that type of rendering. So we voluntarily engage in a world because we are kingdom people. Well, now we come to 1 Corinthians 3, where it's really concerned about this building project that Christians are to build. It's quite clear, even with a casual reading of the New Testament, what we are to build. We are to build up the church. We are to build the *paideia* of the Lord.

[6 : 39] We are to build the community and the culture. The New Testament, even on a simple reading, is quite clear on what it is we are to build, what it is that we are to render to God in the world.

And there are also numerous passages within Scripture, without a doubt, where Christians are told that they will be judged according to their works. It's quite a sobering thought to think that we will be judged according to our works. Or to put it a different way, we will be judged according to how we have built. Not necessarily what we have built, because God will call some men and women to build different things than others. And so the standard judgment is not based on what has been completed, but rather on how it has been completed, or if it has been completed at all. The judgment is not on what we have built, but rather on how we have built. Fire will reveal the testing of our work, is what Paul says here.

Therefore, let's be clear that Christians will be judged according to how they have built. They'll be judged according to their works. They'll be judged by the measurement of whether or not we have done everything to the glory of God. And now it's tempting to think that if we reduced back to a position of waiting and say, well, the Lord is in control. Everything is within his will. Everything is up to him. But we use that as a means of skirting around our responsibility, responsibility, then I must be clear that it does not remove our responsibility. It is true that God is in control. It is true that his will will be done on earth as it is in heaven. But that never ever removes our responsibility to build correctly. And therefore, we cannot say in one hand, well, it's up to the Lord. When on the other hand, God has placed so much of it into our very own hands to build. If he didn't, then he could not judge us for it. We are judged according to our works because of the responsibility that God has given us.

Now, it is the case that if we do not know how to build or what it is that we are building, that God has taken care of this as well. And the way God has taken care of this is by writing it down almost like a blueprint. As we read God's word, especially the New Testament, not only are we aware of what we are to build, but we are aware of how we are to build it so that the judgment's not unfair, unfair, so that we don't get to this place where we are judged according to our works and can say, well, I didn't know. No, God is not unfair. God is incredibly fair in this context. And the way that God demonstrates that fairness is by telling us what we are to build and how we are to build so that it can be judged, so that we can be judged according to our works. And that is exactly what Paul explains here in 1 Corinthians 3, especially in the part that we have read. So let me summarize this if I can. Paul understands that the Corinthian church is a divided church. They're divided over a number of issues against Paul, and they're divided over a number of issues within themselves.

[10 : 34] There are many different things that can create divisions in the church, and one of those things in 1 Corinthians 3 is that some people prefer Apollos and Cephas over and against Paul. And this preference may seem as, well, I just like what I like. I just find him better to listen to or that person better to listen to. And that's fine as a preference, we might wonder, but let's not escape the fact that you are dividing the church. That's how Paul places it.

But that's not the only division. The other divisions is the differences on marriages, the differences on raising families, the differences on what to do with disobedient children in the church.

These things divide the church. And because they are central to building the church up, they must be dealt with. Paul has got a difficult task on his hand. And the reason these people are dividing the church is because they've not fully appreciated the standards of God. They have their own standard and their own preferences. And they don't understand what it is that they have done or are doing. But everything will come to light in the end. Time and truth go hand in hand, that given enough time, the truth will come out. That given enough time, the fire will come and our work will be judged.

That's how serious and sobering this message is of Paul. Another way of putting this would be the way Luke puts it, perhaps, in the book of Acts 2, chapter 2, where he says there are four key considerations for the church. Firstly, the church must be devoted to the apostles' teaching.

They must be devoted to the teaching of the word that the teachers are bringing. Why is this the case? Well, unless everyone is receiving the same word and then committing to the same teaching, then it leads to divisions. Number one, a divided church is a church that doesn't commit to the same word of God. Number two, fellowship. It's impossible to arrive at fellowship unless, of course, there is this devotion to the word of God. Number three, the breaking of bread. Now, this is a natural extension to the fellowship, as Paul says in this very letter of 1 Corinthians, because some people have even died at the communion table. They've even died as they have participated in the communion. Why? Because God deals with his people at the table. God deals with his people quite seriously, and he says this is why some of you are ill and some of you have even died. That God, even in the present tense of the church, is able to deal with the divisions, and he deals with some of those divisions by removing people from the congregation via death. That's how serious the breaking of bread is. And then, of course, prayers.

So we have four key serious considerations to make that allow us to appreciate what the basic foundation of the church is. Teaching from the church is teaching from the word, fellowship in accordance with the word, taking communion in light of the body of Christ and the body of the church, and most importantly, prayers, or as importantly, prayers. There's so much to consider that perhaps we have not focused on as we have should have done. Therefore, we're not unaware as to what it is and what it takes to build a church. In Obery Ephesians, we are told that the foundation of the church is the apostle and prophets, of which Christ is the cornerstone. And Paul says here in verse 10 that he has been given the grace to become a skilled master builder, that he understands the foundation, and now he's involved in the building up of the church, as we all are. And this is where he leads on to, that we are all involved in a building project. And it's not just building one another up with nice conversations.

[15:13] It is building one another up spiritually. It's building marriages up, families up, children up. It's building up the paideia of the Lord, the community, the fellowship, the communion, the teaching. All of these things are included in building of the church. Why? Because there's coming a day where all of that will remain, will become clear. The fire, the judgment will expose the type of work that we have been committing. The day, Paul says, will disclose it. It'll test what sort of work, verse 13, we have actually done. So your work in the church over the years that you have been in the church will go through the test of fire, and you will be judged according to those works. And you will either suffer loss, or you will receive a reward, though you yourself will come through the fire, because you are saved by grace. And so Paul follows this up with the fact that we are indeed God's temple. And if anyone destroys God's temple, either from within or from without, then of course God is going to deal with them. And then of course verse 18, if I can go into the rest of the chapter, don't be given over to worldly wisdom, because that course of action only leads to judgment. That present course of worldly wisdom leads to judgment. Rather, trust in the wisdom of God.

And history shows, biblical history shows, that whenever God's people have departed from his wisdom, they have suffered loss. They have suffered temporal loss, immediate loss, and even permanent loss.

God deals with his people the same today as he has always done. And he has given us these lessons so that we would appreciate the seriousness of building, of working and being judged according to our works.

So what are we building and why? Well, Paul, as I said in Corinthians, doesn't have the best relationship with the church because they're not too keen on the type of things that he has to say to them. And he has to deal with some of the most difficult situations any minister would in a church. But his point here is to be involved in a building work that builds the church up. But what is it that we are actually building? Well, in one sense, we are building up the church. That it is true that Christ will build his church and the gates of Hades will not prevail against it. But Christ builds his church up with the church. Then we're able to build one another up with the spiritual food and the means and the tools that God has given us. We're able to see that the church is being built up in terms of its community, in terms of its fellowship, in terms of its devotions to the Word of God, and to many other things that the New Testament speaks about. But then, of course, there are other parts within the New Testament where we get to see what we're building. Over in Ephesians 6, for instance, we are to build the paideia of the Lord. That it is the duty of the Father to bring up his children in the paideia of the Lord. Why?

Because one doesn't exist. In other words, if you were to bring your children up in the culture of the Lord and in the community of his people, that has to be built. And that has to be built in Paul's day because this is the very birth of the church. Many of the things that he is saying that needs to be built don't currently exist. And they don't exist because this is the very birth of the church.

[19 : 25] The church has to grow and become mature. And so we have community, we have kingdom, we have church, we have culture. We have this paideia of the Lord that Paul speaks about over in Ephesians 6.

So it's very clear when we read the New Testament what it is that we are to build. And it's very clear here in 1 Corinthians 3 that we will be judged according to how we have built. We will be judged according to our works. Now Paul says that we should not deceive ourselves with worldly wisdom. Those who pursue worldly wisdom and say, well, this is how it's always happened. This is how it has always been done. Without ever questioning whether or not it has been done to the glory of God or it has been done according to the standards of God. Are going along a course which only ends in suffering loss.

They suffer the consequences of their own actions or in this case, inactions. And so the overall point is a simple one. That God has made it clear what we are to build.

And God has made it clear how we are to build. And God has also made it clear why we are building what we are. And therefore the penalty for destroying the temple in the present context is so serious.

[21 : 04] And also the judgment that is to come according to our works is also a serious matter indeed. And therefore those who have established boundary lines between the church and the kingdom as if this is to do with fellowship, that's to do with evangelism.

Or between the kingdom and the world and the church and the world as if this is what we do in here but what we do out in the world is on our own time for our own means and our own ends.

Are participating in the type of division that Paul is warning us against. They are participating in the type of things that divide the church and create divisions and which eventually lead to them suffering loss.

Because they are the type of divisions which Paul is addressing here that we should be avoiding and building against. Those who reduce the kingdom of God to simply evangelism or gospel proclamation are failing to see what Paul says elsewhere in Ephesians 6 when he speaks about the paideia of the Lord.

This cultural transformation, this building up of a new community of God's people using the tools and the commitments that God has given us to make such a culture.

[22 : 33] I have written on my window at home with a glass marker so it'll come off that if we do not have a Christian culture then I am obligated to build one.

And that's really the message to the church from Ephesians 6, 4. That if we do not have a Christian culture then we are obligated to build one.

And Paul understands that we don't in the early church and therefore one must be built. Therefore the church cannot live behind a set of closed doors and expect that our work pass the test.

Because our work must transcend both the church, the kingdom and the world. Remember the first message. That though we're not under obligation to the world system nonetheless because of grace we voluntarily engage in the conditions of the world just as Christ did in saving us.

In other words, be like Jesus. The simple test in this present age to see whether or not we are building according to the standards of God is simply to ask the question is what I am doing in accordance with God's glory?

[23 : 57] We are told that we are to do everything in accordance with the glory of God. Everything that you do, in word, in deed, whether you eat, drink or sleep do it all to the glory of God. Well, are we?

That's the test. So what then about the judgment and reward? Well, notice how Paul in verse 13 says quite clearly that it is our work that will become manifest.

He focuses not so much on the materials used in verse 12 as he does on how the work has been completed, verse 13.

What is being exposed is how we have built and what we have used to build. Seeing that we will be judged according to these works, then we must recognize what these works are.

Now, as I said previously, it may be tempting for some of us to say that everything is in the hands of God and take a back seat. It may be tempting to say, well, whatever the will of God is, that will happen and take a back seat.

[25 : 08] It may be tempting to believe that because God's will will be done and everything is in his hands and he is sovereign, that I therefore have no real responsibility.

responsibility. But the fact that we will be judged according to our works is God telling us very clearly that we have responsibility.

And we are judged according to how we have worked because he holds us responsible. He will test what we have built, how we have built it, already knowing the motive of our heart of why we are doing what we have done.

So what we are building is clear. How we are to build it is clear. Why we are to build it is clear. And the judgment will test all of those.

It will reveal how well we have done this work of God. Now, it follows that if the church is built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets and Christ is, of course, the cornerstone, that the way to build initially is be committed to the four key things.

[26 : 21] Devotion to the word, devotion to fellowship, devotion to the breaking of bread, and, of course, devotion to prayers. And sort of the simple question we must ask is, are all of those things done to the glory of God?

That would be a present tense judgment. But to give you an example of perhaps how I have arrived at the conclusions that I come to, and perhaps for you to question why you have arrived at the conclusions that you have come to, let me go back to a series of messages that I gave on communion.

Why has it been the case, and I'm using this as an example and only as an example, an illustration, perhaps. Why is it the case that I have arrived at the conclusion that the church should participate in a weekly communion?

Simply put, because the early church participated in a weekly communion. Therefore, you're able to test my conclusion with what the word of God says, and you're able to see whether or not I am saying something different than Scripture, or if I am saying something which the Scripture says. Am I being faithful, or am I being unfaithful? Have I diverted, or am I holding true to the line which Scripture takes?

[27 : 49] And therefore, there's a burden on the other person to arrive to explain the conclusion that they've arrived at for not doing it. And therefore, we put these two conclusions together and understand, well, which is more valid in the light of God's word?

This is how things are tested. Which view, which conclusion, which reading of Scripture is more valid than the other? And the reason we do this is so that we're able to arrive at the place where we are building properly.

Now, some would say, but I've been in the church 50 years, and no church I know does this. Okay. But that doesn't make, that's not the deciding factor of whether or not it's right or wrong.

God's word is. And if you, of course, you are tempted to rely on your history, or your experience, or what church was like when you were growing up, as the standard, then please remember that that will not be the standard to which you will be judged according to your works.

The standard with which we will be judged according to our works is indeed the word of God. So this is just an example, and of course, this doesn't stop at communion. This stops at marriage, children, family, work, business, employment, employers, everything.

[29 : 22] And these are the very subjects that Paul gets to in Corinthians. Paul has told us what we are to build.

He has told us why we are to build it. And he has told us why we should be concerned with the level of seriousness, because we will be judged according to our works.

And we don't want to be the type of people who lead the church into little divisions or even big divisions and cause a generation of believers that have come up to be starved of the necessary tools and ingredients that they need to grow in the faith.

In other words, I've heard plenty of stories of families who have decided to take their children out of one church and go to another church because there's more children there. Now, the fact that you never see that happening in Scripture indicates that while that may be a fair conclusion for that family to arrive at, it is much more serious if the children are not growing up in a church where

they're able to participate in weekly communion, if indeed, of course, they're saved, or they're able to participate in prayers and fellowship and the breaking of bread and come under the word of God because they're the things that will build a person, not these other things.

In other words, it all comes down to what you think will do the work that you want to accomplish. No, no. What it comes down to is what you know will do the work that God wants accomplishing.

[31 : 01] And this is why we will be judged according to our works. Remaining faithful to God despite the results is what God will judge us according to.

Salvation is by grace. That's the work of God that will do in any of our lives, young or old. But the things that are within our hands, we will be judged according to.

We've looked at the cost of the kingdom, the priority of following Christ. Now we've looked at what it means to build and understand the priority and judgment that God places upon his people and the responsibility to build.

So here's your final exhortation, at least for this message. Knowing that we will be judged according to our works is a sobering message. knowing that we will be judged according to our works makes us sit up and pay attention.

It brings us to that place of absolute seriousness to consider what we have done, why we have done it, or whether or not we have done it at all. Not only for ourselves, but for the church.

[32 : 20] we don't want to face the judgment and be participators in its divisions. Rather, we want to be master builders. We want to be skilled builders using the tools that God has given us to build what he has called us to build.

Therefore, as we have seen, we are bound to render to God the things that belong to God, and we are to render to Caesar the things that belong to Caesar and pray for his kingdom to come and his will to be done on earth as it is in heaven.

Amen. And thank you for listening to God's word. Well, we're going to come back for, as we do, to receive a blessing from God's word and the final prayers before that will come to this next hymn.

Thank you. Praise you in the morning Praise you in the evening Praise you when I'm young and when I'm old Praise you when I'm laughing Praise you when I'm grieving Praise you every season of the storm If we could see how much your worth Your power Your mind Your endless love And surely we would never cease to praise everything Everything that Everything that Everything that has breath

Praise the Lord Praise you in the heavens Join in with the angels praising you praising you forever and a day Praise you on the earth now Joining with creation Calling all the nations to your praise If they could see how much If they could see how much Your power Your power Your might Your endless love And surely Surely they would never cease to praise Everything that Everything that Everything that Everything that Everything that Everything that Has breath Praise be

[35 : 21] Everything that Everything that Everything that Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.

Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.

Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Because we are a people of grace, we're not under obligation, but we voluntarily engage in the world in the same way Christ did.

[37 : 11] And as we do, we will know his blessing, for his blessing is upon those who live according to his wisdom and not the wisdom of the world. And so let me exhort you to live according to his wisdom, and may you know his blessing both today and throughout this week.

In Jesus' name I ask for it. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen.