

Iglesia de Carne

Studies in First Corinthians

Text

First Corinthians 3:5-23

Topic

Paul tells the Corinthians about the Reward Seat of Jesus where the quality of our works will be tested by fire

Title

“Remember: Only YOU Can Prevent Reward Loss Fires”

I came across this list of slogans taken from church marquees:

- “Download your worries, Upload peace”
- “This church is prayer-conditioned”
- “God answers knee-mail”
- “Body piercing saved my life”
- “For all you do, His blood’s for you”

Suppose for a moment that the first century church at Corinth had a marquee. Here are some of the things that, according to the apostle Paul, might be posted on it:

- “Babes in Christ”
- “Still carnal”
- “Behaving like mere men”
- “Envy, strife, and division among [us]”
- “[Building] with wood, hay, and straw”



Take the next step with me. If Calvary Hanford had a marquee sign, what would **we** say? What would Paul say?

Let's cut to the chase: What would Jesus say?

Before answering, let's take a look in our passage at one of the apostle Paul's favorite illustrations of the church:

- He describes himself as a “wise master builder” who was one of the grace-gifted guys called by God to, as he states it, “lay the foundation [of the church]... which is Jesus Christ” (v10&11).
- He will go on to say that believers are simultaneously the *builders* who continue working on the foundation; and we are the *building* being built upon the foundation.

Buildings get inspected as they are being built. So do we as we are building and being built, and upon completion of our earthly life. We should welcome it because Jesus is the one doing the inspecting. Paul is going to encourage us to build well heading towards our final inspection.

I'll organize my comments around two questions: #1 What Will Jesus Say To You As His Builder?, and #2 What Will Jesus Say To Us As His Building?

#1 What Will Jesus Say To You As His Builder? (v5-15)

I think it was A.W. Tower who described some Bible teachers as “spinning straw from gold.” One way of doing that is to dive-in too early and miss the big-picture; to begin dissecting before admiring the beauty of the rose.

The big picture here in our text is this: **God has given us the incredible opportunity to assist Him.**

When you consider all the ways God *could* have done His work, it is stunning to think He solicits our participation.



If you are in Christ, you are a builder; and you can build things that have eternal value. You can build from the moment you are born-again, until the moment you exhale for the last time. You need no natural talent or ability because you are gifted by God to build *when* and *where* He directs you.

I like what David Guzik said, that in general, “We cannot work without Him, [but] He will not work without us.”

The Corinthians had several builders - notably Paul and Apollos.

1Co 3:5 Who then is Paul, and who *is* Apollos, but ministers through whom you believed, as the Lord gave to each one?

Paul and Apollos were the two men most responsible for laying the foundation and building upon it in Corinth. They were “ministers,” or better translated, *servants*. They preached the Cross and many “believed” and “the Lord gave” the gift of eternal life.

1Co 3:6 I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the increase.

Paul and Apollos are compared to sowers in a field. Some seed fell on good ground and “God gave the increase.”

I thought we were talking about building - not farming? We are, and maybe this will help:

- In Matthew 13:44 we read, "... the kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which a man found and hid; and for joy over it he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field." The man represents Jesus; the field is the world; the purchase of the field refers to the Cross by which Jesus provides salvation for the sins of the whole world.
- In the Parable of the Sower, Jesus said that the field being sown was the world (Matthew 13:39).



We could say that Jesus has acquired a field in the field of the earth by His crucifixion. He sends laborers to sow the Word of God. The fruit from their sowing is the salvation of those who believe.

In that field, set apart spiritually from the world, a foundation has been laid by the apostles. Jesus is building His church on that foundation with your assistance.

There were lots of temples in Corinth to the various so-called gods. There never was a temple like the one built on the foundation of Jesus. Its members were and are living stones. Unique hardly describes the temple of the Holy Spirit on earth.

1Co 3:7 So then neither he who plants is anything, nor he who waters, but God who gives the increase.

It wasn't that Paul was a great sower; or that Apollos knew just how to water. They simply served God and He saw to it that the Gospel changed lives.

1Co 3:8 Now he who plants and he who waters are one, and each one will receive his own reward according to his own labor.

Certain gifts or posts of service seem more exciting or encouraging than others. All that matters to a servant is that he or she is faithful. Each of us will be rewarded according to our "own labor," not in comparison to anyone else's.

1Co 3:9 For we are God's fellow workers; you are God's field, *you are* God's building.

We are all "workers," on equal footing, with equal, full access to the Holy Spirit. We are sowing the Word and building a spiritual building in the field of the world where none previously existed. Our impact ought to be so remarkable that nonbelievers see the light in the darkness and find spiritual rest and refuge.



1Co 3:10 According to the grace of God which was given to me, as a wise master builder I have laid the foundation, and another builds on it. But let each one take heed how he builds on it.

Paul was given the particular “grace,” or gift, of establishing churches. We need to be a little careful about establishing churches. You’re dealing with people’s lives, their spiritual lives. There needs to be a real leading from the Lord to establish a new work.

“Wise master builder” translates to *architect* but in usage the idea is more like the person we would call the General Contractor. Paul was given the plans and he established the foundation then turned it over to the others who would build upon it.

That would make all of us subcontractors who should “take heed how [we build] on it.” Taking heed means two things: Trusting the foundation, and building with appropriate materials.

1Co 3:11 For no other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ:

Albert Barnes says of the foundation:

No true church can be reared which does not embrace and hold the true doctrines respecting Him - those which pertain to His incarnation, His divine nature, His instructions, His example, His atonement, His resurrection, and ascension. The reason why no true church can be established without embracing the truth as it is in Christ is, that it is by Him only that people can be saved; and where this doctrine is missing, all is missing that enters into the essential idea of a church.

1Co 3:12 Now if anyone builds on this foundation *with* gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw,



One thing to consider that is sometimes overlooked is that **all** these were possible building materials that were used in temples being constructed in the first century:

- “Wood” was used for doors and posts, “hay” was dried grass mixed with mud and used for walls, and straw could be used as roofing material.
- “Gold” and “silver” referred to the costly ornamentation in temples while “precious stones” might refer to the granite or marble that would be overlaid with gold and silver.

Paul is going to describe these materials being tested by fire. It seems clear enough that “gold, silver, precious stones” will survive the test, whereas “wood, hay, straw” won’t.

You’ve seen those eerie photos of homes destroyed after a fire. Often all that is left is what? The foundation and a brick chimney. All the other materials did not survive the test by fire.

One way to approach what is being said is to simply say that you can build with materials that are either *costly*, or that are *common*.

Think of the projects around your house. There are always choices in materials. Some will do the job but won’t last as long. You might choose them when you’re putting your house on the market. Common. Other materials have a much higher quality. You choose them if you plan on living in your house for a long time. Costly.

1Co 3:13 each one's work will become clear; for the Day will declare it, because it will be revealed by fire; and the fire will test each one's work, of what sort it is.

1Co 3:14 If anyone's work which he has built on *it* endures, he will receive a reward.

1Co 3:15 If anyone's work is burned, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire.



The “Day” is when believers stand before the Reward Seat and have their choice of materials tested by fire. We read in Second Corinthians 5:10,

2Co 5:10 For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things done in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad.

It’s a review of your serving, *not* a determination of your salvation. To avoid any confusion, Paul insisted, “he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire.”

A word about “rewards.” Because of imagery in the Revelation, at the Second Coming, I’ve come to see rewards as adornments we can add to our robes of righteousness as we serve Jesus. What bride doesn’t want to have a great dress, and be as beautiful as possible for her Groom?

What will Jesus say to you as His builder? Let’s restrict Him to these two words: Costly... Common.

It’s obviously overly simplistic, but that’s OK. Sometimes we over complicate things, and it keeps us from the gist of the inspection. Looking at your life as a whole, can you say that it has cost you, or it is costing you, anything to be a believer in Christ?

What’s the cost? What, or who, have you given up... Or lost... Or been denied... For serving God?

Exclude any troubles or suffering that is part of the human condition. We’re examining our lives for the cost of being a Christian.

Is it costly? Or is your life pretty much common and comfortable? We’ll have time at the end of the service for you to call for inspection.

#2 What Will Jesus Say To Us As His Building? (v16-23)



If you Google Calvary Hanford you'll see we have a rating of 4½ stars out of 5. *What????* Someone gave us 1 star without commenting. Must have been the Sunday we took multiple offerings... *Kidding!!!*

1Co 3:16 Do you not know that you are the temple of God and *that* the Spirit of God dwells in you?

The word "you" here is plural, meaning the believers corporately as the church. These verses are not really about us as individuals.

True, our individual bodies **are** in-dwelt by God the Holy Spirit. But so is (or should be) our gatherings on earth. After all, we are that building in the field into which folks come to be saved.

BTW: One overlooked argument for being part of a local fellowship is that the Holy Spirit is (or should be) there in a special way. Folks who avoid church are ignoring a personal invitation from God to meet with Him. Instead, they insist He come to them.

1Co 3:17 If anyone defiles the temple of God, God will destroy him. For the temple of God is holy, which *temple* you are.

The first part of the verse is a kind of common proverb. It boils down to meaning that the defiler will be disciplined. You don't have to leave Corinth to see this in action.

In chapter eleven we will be introduced to believers who were defiling the celebration of the Lord's Supper. As a result, we read, "For this reason many *are* weak and sick among you, and many sleep [die prematurely] (v30). The defilers were being disciplined; some by death.

"The Temple of God" - corporately - is "holy" - it is set apart. Again, the idea is our unique existence in the world.



No example will do this justice, but we have to try. If you are a fan of *The Lord of the Rings*, think about the refuge that was provide the nine weary travelers in Rivendell. It was a beautiful, refreshing, seemingly timeless stop along the harsh road. That is what our gatherings ought to be like.

1Co 3:18 Let no one deceive himself. If anyone among you seems to be wise in this age, let him become a fool that he may become wise.

The wisdom of men versus the wisdom of God has been a major topic in this letter. Paul returns to it here to emphasize once again that someone who is “wise in this age” - meaning they trust in mans wisdom - should rather trust God’s wisdom.

How can you tell if you are trusting God’s wisdom? One way is that you will “become a fool” in the eyes of the world. Do any of your choices seem foolish to others? They should.

1Co 3:19 For the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God. For it is written, "HE CATCHES THE WISE IN THEIR OWN CRAFTINESS";

The quote is from Job. It is a profound statement indicating human wisdom falls in on itself.

Quite simply, men contradict themselves, and their methods don’t work. Every religion, philosophy, psychology, is built on a foundation of shifting sand.

1Co 3:20 and again, "THE LORD KNOWS THE THOUGHTS OF THE WISE, THAT THEY ARE FUTILE."

This is quoted from the ninety-fourth psalm. Human wisdom is ultimately futile in that it cannot accomplish what needs to be done. A man needs to be forgiven of sin, justified, declared righteous, and become a new creation in Jesus Christ. Those things can only be received by grace at the Cross where Jesus took our place in death to give us eternal life.

1Co 3:21 Therefore let no one boast in men. For all things are yours:



This “boast[ing] in men” harkens back to a problem previously brought up, namely, that the believers in Corinth were putting too much emphasis on particular teachers rather than look past them to God.

If I asked you who Buddhists follow, you’d say “Buddha.” Likewise for Muslims, “Mohammed.”

We do not follow Paul, or Apollos, or Peter - or any human teacher. We follow Jesus Who has given men like those to His church for centuries, so we might be built-up.

“For all things are yours.” Before you get too excited, “all things” includes things like “death,” as we’ll read in a moment. Paul wasn’t telling me that I can have that Ferrari I want. Or that I can be CEO of a chain of PastorsPour cafes.

He’s telling us that as the building of God on the earth, His temple in the field, we have an entirely new and different perspective on everything.

1Co 3:22 whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas, or the world or life or death, or things present or things to come - all are yours.

In our attempt to assign everything a quick, easy meaning, we can overlook just how multi-faceted the words of Scripture really are. The things Paul listed as all yours have multiple applications. I’ll suggest a couple for each.

1. “Paul... Apollos... Peter...” are yours. These first century men made an impact on the world that can be traced forward to you getting saved. They are part of your spiritual ancestry. They are your spiritual fathers.
 2. We also get from this that God still sends us to. plant and sow. You are somebody’s Paul.
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1. The “world” is yours to work in, as a laborer with God. It is meaningful, life-changing work.



2. Then, too, He has given you the world to struggle against - honing your skills in spiritual warfare as a good soldier of God.
1. “Life or death” is yours can’t help but remind you of Paul’s epic statement that “to live is Christ, but to die is gain.” It is a powerful, liberating way to live.
 2. “Life or death” is also yours in the sense that you have every spiritual resource you require to live for God; and that you know all about the afterlife.
1. “Things present or things to come” are yours in that you are to live now in such a way that you are ready for the things the Bible says are coming upon the world. For us, that means the imminent rapture.
 2. “Things present or things to come” also reminds you that you can be in the world, enjoy it, without becoming enslaved by it. In the future, rewards await.

This is a very small example of what we saw earlier: the “deep things of God.” Think of your own applications.

1Co 3:23 And you *are* Christ's, and Christ *is* God's.

In the plan of salvation, God the Father sent Jesus because He “so loved the world...” Jesus died on the Cross - lifted-up on it so all would be drawn to Him. He is thus the Savior of all men - especially those who believe. From God, to Jesus, to you.

What is on our spiritual marquee? It’s ultimately up to the Lord. Let’s concentrate on serving Him, and having it cost us something, so He can write something worthy of eternity.

