

Title: A Jesus-Driven Ministry

Text: 1 Corinthians 3.10-15

Theme: Right building on the right foundation

Series: 1 Corinthians #13

Proposition Statement: The structure of the ministry has to be built in a manner that is consistent with the foundation.

I read this week that federal forecasters have predicted another bad hurricane season. They anticipate that 15 storms will be named 9 of which will become hurricanes and 5 of them will be classified as being major hurricanes. Besides helping out the stock price of Home Depot, hurricanes have had some benefits, particularly in Florida, where through the years, the building codes have been strengthened so that commercial and residential structures are built to be able to withstand the fury of these storms. Many homes are now being built with steel roofs. You can drive through cities and still see buildings waiting to be repaired. The toll of 4 hurricanes in a single season in a single state is high.

Our text is dealing with building codes and disasters. The disaster in view is not a hurricane but a fire. This metaphor that Paul uses would have resonated very well with the Corinthians. But there are about 3 things that we need consider in order to fully appreciate the message of this text. 1) Remember that Corinth had a two-part history. In her earlier days she was a thriving city that was destroyed by the Romans (146 B.C.). The Romans burned the city to the ground. What a visual! The structure of buildings which were constructed of marble and stone while charred, were left standing, while the buildings with thatched roofs and wood beams left vacant lots. The message was very clear. How you built determined how you would survive the fire. 2) Another factor that is helpful for us is to remember is that when 1 Corinthians was written it usually took decades to build buildings. The person who supervised the laying of the foundation was quite often, not the person who actually built the building. You can understand the picture. If you do not build the right foundation, then the person who tries to build on that, will have a mess because the building will not last. If you have the right foundation, but you do not use the right materials to build, the building still will not last. 3) In those days, they built buildings to last for hundreds of years. There are buildings in Rome that are still standing that the apostle Paul saw. Some of the roads are still intact from 2,000 years ago. We can't get them to last 2 years. We typically do not build like that. We build, tear down, build again, tear down and rebuild. Frankly, I think this has contributed to our cultural rootlessness, but that is another discussion. But keep those 3 things in view: Their history with fire, the length of time it took to build buildings and the enduring quality of their work.

This text, while written to the church, is written to the leaders of the church. It is a sobering text, full of warning and full of admonition. As a student of the Bible, I marvel at how Paul writes. He is at once so clear and so brilliant. He captures the elusive dynamics of life within a church. The verses we looked at last week were a warning to the people to not put your leaders on too high of a pedestal. After all, God is the hero, the ruler and the owner. Paul uses the analogy of a field, and then at the end of v.9 he

transitions to the analogy of a building. “You are God’s field” and then he writes “God’s building” that is, you are God’s building.

Verses 10-15 are written to the people who are doing the actual building of the church. This passage has been applied to individual believers to warn them about the motives of the work they do for the Lord. That could certainly be a point of application, but the main point of this text is for the people who are doing the actual building up of the ministry. Obviously the leadership of the church is in view. It should be very clear to you from the text that the church is not a building, it is people. The analogy of the building is used to describe the people. Here is the challenge. Build people on Jesus Christ not on yourself. Let’s dig in.

In the Church:

### **1. The Foundation is Jesus Christ.**

Using the church at Corinth as the example, Paul describes himself as an expert or master builder. He brings all of his skill, experience and expertise to the project. But, in this project, like many of the construction projects of his day, Paul does not get to finish what he starts. His part in the project is to lay the foundation. The foundation has to be done right. Paul says, I did it right. I laid the foundation right. I laid the only foundation that there is for church. The foundation is Jesus Christ. In fact, the foundation is only Jesus Christ.

Many people will mouth those words and will sing the songs, but not really understand it or not really believe it. What does it mean for the foundation of a church to be Jesus Christ? Keep in mind that a church is a group of people, not a building. What does it mean for people to have their lives built upon Jesus Christ? Based upon what Paul has already said about Christ, this is very clear.

#### **A. The foundation is the person of Jesus Christ**

- 1) He is God the very God who became a man.
- 2) He is sinless

#### **B. The foundation is the work of Jesus Christ**

- 1) He lived for you - Christ is our righteousness (1.30)

He came to this earth to live in your place, because the way you naturally live and the way I naturally live is wrong and therefore sinful. If I had never met Christ, then every day, I would just be adding to my own judgment because of my self-centered, sinful heart and actions. Christ lived the life that you and I could never live. He lived perfectly.

- 2) He died for you - Christ was crucified (2.3)

Because He was the infinite, sinless Savior, who lived for you, He brought in his own person all of this righteousness to the cross, when he died. He was the perfect sacrifice who received the wrath of God because Jesus took your place on that cross. Because he was credited with your sin, he was viewed as being sinful and God treated him that way and poured out his wrath on Him. Christ died for you. He paid the price of your sin so that you would not have to do what you could not do in all of eternity. That is the gospel. The good news is that God made the only way possible for your sins to be forgiven. There is no other way.

### C. **The foundation is the message of Jesus Christ** – the gospel

“For Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel.” (1.17) “For I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and him crucified.” (2.3) “I laid the foundation as an expert builder – “For no one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ.”

First of all, the leadership has to figure out the gospel. The gospel is good news for those who understand it, and believe it. But those who do not understand it or those who do not believe it, will be judged by the gospel. Please listen carefully. You must understand the gospel in order to believe it. I want you to understand the gospel. If you do not understand the gospel, then this church has no foundation. The gospel is powerful, but it is also exclusive. In other words, the gospel is the only means by which a person can have his sins forgiven and escape hell. Only through the gospel can a person be declared righteous in the eyes of God and be eternally at peace with God in heaven. This is only through the gospel. Just because people say they believe the gospel, does not mean they believe the true gospel. This is not popular to teach today because even though the Bible is very clear about this, when you teach it people accuse you of slamming other religions. But, if you do not teach that the true gospel is the only means by which a person can be declared righteous, then you are setting a flawed foundation.

This gospel, has to be personally embraced by your faith alone – in Christ alone. You cannot rely upon what religious label you have or what you think that you have to do in order to earn your forgiveness. You have to realize that you cannot in any way pay for your sin. You may have been raised thinking that if you are confirmed or baptized in the church then you are now a Christian. Or you may think that since you are not as bad as other people in the world, or that you are a fairly good person in your heart that when you die God will look the other way about your sin and accept you into His heaven. Please understand that He cannot and will not do that. The only way for you to be rightly related to God is through a right understanding of who Christ is, what He has done and then putting the entire weight of your soul upon Him. That is the gospel. That is the one and only foundation of the church. If a church does not have this as its foundation, whatever else it is, it is not the church. It may be a church, but it is not His Church. Now, as important as the gospel is – and it is clearly important. That is not the main idea of this text.

This text has another one of the chiasmic structures to it.

A1 I laid a foundation as an expert builder

B1 And someone else is building on it

B2 But each one should be careful how he builds

A2 For no one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ.

You can see (B1, B2) that this is the main point that Paul is making here, and the rest of the paragraph bears this out. Leaders, you had better make certain that you are building, not only on the right foundation, but that you are building the right way on the right foundation. The gospel is not simply to save people from sin. Saving people from the penalty of sin is only a part of the gospel. The gospel is designed to make people become like Christ. Therefore, the church is supposed to cooperate with that goal. The church is a community of believers who are being conformed into the image of Jesus Christ and who are helping people be conformed into the image of Jesus Christ. If you have not become a genuine follower of Christ, this church is here to help you become a follower of Christ. We want to help every person who comes here, who is alienated from God becomes rightly related to God through Christ, and then to take on the character of Christ and eventually look like Christ. That is why the ministry of the church has to be focused and intentional because...

## 2. **The Church must reflect the Foundation.** (12)

What did Paul mean by gold, silver, costly stones, wood, hay and straw? Since the passage goes on to talk about how fire will test the quality of the building material, all that Paul is doing is giving some examples of combustible and non-combustible material. Gold, silver and costly stones will endure through a fire. Gold and silver may melt, but they will still be gold and silver. Wood, hay and straw (material for thatched roofs) will feed the fire, not survive it.

### A. **You must build with the right materials.** (theology)

The way that you build people must be done in a manner that is consistent with the foundation. We do not look to Jesus for salvation and then look to Oprah or Dr. Phil for how to handle life. We do not look to Christ to save us from hell and then look to Desperate Housewives for ideas on relationships. The world does not set the agenda for the church.

Let me try to tie all of this together. The only foundation of the church is the true gospel. The structure of the church has to reflect the theology of the gospel. If the foundation is flawed, the church will fall. If the structure uses inferior materials, it will still fall. We all know of cases in which people tried to take shortcuts and build something that initially looked good, but in the end did not stand. If you want to do that with your own house – that is your decision, but we cannot do that with the people of the church. Souls are at stake. Every day, we are fighting for the future of the church. Leaders, the way that we

teach people how to live is absolutely critical that it accurately reflect the gospel. The truths of justification are lived out in our sanctification.

Warning: I am about to get personal – are you ready? What if you say, I do not like to go to church with a bunch of old people. Is the gospel only for young people? No! So, if the way we build the church is to be based on the right foundation and the gospel is for all people, then we have to reject that attitude as being dead wrong. What if you say, I do not like to go to church with a bunch of young people? Is the gospel only for old people? No! What if you say – I do not like to go to church with a bunch of black people, or Asian people or white collar professionals, or blue collar laborers, or Ohio State fans – what have you done? Worse yet, what if we say, we are going to build a church for young people, or just for black people, or just for Ohio State fans, what are we doing? Even if we understand the gospel we are intentionally building with flawed combustible materials because the way we are building the church is not consistent with the foundation of the church. The gospel is based on the fear of the Lord, therefore the church cannot operate on the fear of man. The gospel humbles sinners and exalts God’s glory, therefore the church cannot operate as an instrument to stroke egos.

- You have to build on the right gospel – which is clearly under attack even by churches that used to believe it.
- You have to build with the right theology of sanctification – which is understood even less than the gospel is these days.
- You have to build with the right motives.

#### **B. You must build with the right motives. (intent)**

As difficult as it is to establish the right foundation and then to build properly on that, this part is very convicting, and very challenging to me. The reason I think that when Paul was talking about building with the wrong materials that he was also referring to motives is because of what he said in 4.5b. Notice 4.5b “He will bring to light what is hidden in darkness and will expose the motives of men’s hearts.”

This is what is so difficult. When I really think about it, there is probably not one thing that I do that is completely free from an impure motive. I have not arrived, spiritually. I am not in heaven yet. I still battle with sin. Sin affects me. It clearly affects my motives. If you say, “I think that you preached that, so that you would look good to others.” You would probably be partially right. Even my tears of repentance need to be washed in the blood of the Lamb. There is so much self-interest, self-preservation, self-centeredness in us all, that even on our best day, we still taint everything that we do. So, why not quit? No way! You see, I pray that this year, there is less impurity in me than last year. And I pray that next year, there will be less impurity than this year. And God uses “success” and “failure” to weed my heart of wrong motives.

Leadership in the church is serious business. It is a great deal easier to build a crowd than to build a church. I love what I do, but frankly it scares me to death. But I find

great, great comfort in the opening words of v.10. “By the grace God has given me, I laid a foundation.” How much grace is that? All that I will ever need.

### 3. **The Church will be tested by Fire.** (13-15)

Leaders, our ministry will be examined by God Himself. If we had a Jesus-driven ministry, then it will be obvious. If Christ was our message and our method, on the DAY it will be seen. What Day is that? This is the Day of the Lord, which refers to the end of this era when amongst many other things happening we will stand before God and give an accounting of our lives. Notice beginning in v.13, “his work will be shown for what it is because the Day will bring it to light. It will be revealed with fire. This passage is teaching two things. There is a reward for the leaders who build the right way.

#### A. **True Builder will be rewarded.**

#### B. **The False Builder will be revealed.**

There is a revelation for those who build the wrong way. This is not talking about salvation. The brilliant work of a wise-builder does not earn salvation and the inferior work of another builder does not mean that he forfeits his salvation. Salvation is not in view in this passage and neither is this talking about purgatory. There is no such place. Those who claim that there is a place called purgatory have tried to claim that they get that doctrine from this passage. But it is obviously not teaching that. The builder (the leader) is not going through the fire, the builder’s work is being tested by fire. In this text, the builder is the leader. The building is the people of the church. God will test. God will examine the quality of each man’s work. If he used the right materials (theology) and the right motives, he will be rewarded. If not, on that day, it will be made obvious. When Paul says (end of v.15) that he, the builder, will be saved, but only as one escaping through the flames, he is speaking of a builder who used shoddy materials in a building that he is living in, that caught fire. The builder made it out alive, but all of his work went up in smoke.

Conclusion:

Outside of Chicago a Hindu temple has just recently been completed, built out of 40,000 pieces of limestone and marble that were cut and carved by 3,000 workers in India, where each piece was cataloged and shipped to Bartlett, IL a suburb of Chicago where they were assembled. Some of the pieces weighed as much as 10,000 pounds. The entire structure weighed so much that 85,000 cubic feet of stone was used in the foundation and after the foundation was set, the building did not begin for several months to make certain that there would be no settling. This building is designed to last for at least 500 to 1,000 years. Is the building impressive? Yes, but from God’s perspective, a total waste. Impressive buildings and fancy letterhead does not make a church. A proper understanding of the gospel and lives that are built in a manner that is consistent with that gospel is what church really is. Cornerstone, we can do things that will build a crowd, but not too many people are willing to pay the price to build a church. That is our call.