

Text: I Corinthians 3:10-17

Title: “Be Careful How You Build”

INTRODUCTION

Open your Bibles to I Corinthians 3:10.

ILLUSTRATION – A little over a year ago the popular sitcom Everybody Loves Raymond broadcast its final episode after nine seasons. Due to the series, the star, Ray Romano, went from struggling stand-up comedian to one of the highest-paid actors on TV. At the conclusion of the last day's filming, Romano spoke to the studio audience, reflecting on his past and his future. He read a note his brother had stuck in his luggage the day he moved from New York to Hollywood nine years earlier. It said, "What does it profit a man if he gains the whole world and loses his soul?" With tears in his eyes Ray Romano looked up and told the audience, "Now I'm going to work on my soul."

I have an idea that many of us here today are running like mad to produce the next episode of life, but for all that we still feel empty and tired. Could it be that we feel the way we do because we haven't been as Ray Romano put it ... working on our soul.

If we are to grow in our faith and in the likeness of our Lord, it's important that we understand the nature of our life in Christ. Here in I Cor.3 Paul uses two powerful images:

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

Image #1 (agricultural) – The church is like a field where the seed of the Gospel is sown by some, cultivated by others, and harvested by others. Christians are like plants growing in a field hopefully bringing a harvest.

Image #2 (architectural) – The church is like a building under construction. Note: Never mistake the church house (physical building) for the real church. Remember the little rhyme we said using our hands: “This is the church. Here is the steeple. Open the door and there are the people.”

No, the church is the people, not the physical building.

But the church is *like* a building that has a foundation, walls, doors, windows and a roof. And so it is the second image that Paul turns to now in challenging the Corinthian believers to grow up. Our life in Christ is like a building.

1. THE FOUNDATION OF OUR LIFE IN CHRIST (vv.10-11)

Any building that lasts has to have a proper foundation.

ILLUSTRATION – I remember watching as our Welcome Center building got under way last year. They worked for months just on the foundation. If it isn't secure, if it isn't right, the rest of the building will not be right.

Our life in Christ has a great foundation.

1 Corinthians 3:10-11 – “By the grace God has given me, I laid a foundation as an expert builder ... 11 For no one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ.”

When we are saved the first thing that happens is that Jesus Christ becomes the foundation of our life. If that doesn't happen, we aren't truly saved.

That's what Paul did when he came to Corinth on one of his missionary journey and stayed there for a year and a half. He preached Christ, he preached the Cross, and people put their faith in Christ for the gift of eternal life.

Paul calls himself here "expert builder," and the word used in the original is the word from which we get our word "architect." But he really uses this word in a different sense than we use the word "architect" today. It was more like a general contractor who sees to it that everything goes in place in the proper order.

And once the foundation of Jesus Christ is laid in our lives the foundation never leaves. For the rest of our lives Jesus Christ ... His person, His life, His teachings, His resurrection, His ascension, His coming to us by the Holy Spirit, and His coming again in the last days ... is what we stand upon.

Christ is the foundation for the church.

Every church that departs from teaching about Christ and his work, his person and his resurrection, begins fall apart, and finally collapses and crumbles into nothing.

Christ is the foundation for the individual believer.

Every person who is not built upon that foundation will find his life crumbling and failing ultimately.

If the foundation of your life is Jesus Christ and His Word, you don't ever have to worry about developing cracks in the foundation.

2. THE CONSTRUCTION OF OUR LIFE IN CHRIST (vv.10b,12)

So when we are saved God puts the foundation into place in our lives. Then we begin to build on that foundation. This is what spiritual growth is all about ... building on the foundation ... growing into the person God wants us to be.

1 Corinthians 3:10b,12 - But each one should be careful how he builds. 12 If any man builds on this foundation using gold, silver, costly stones, wood, hay or straw...

You see, Paul says, “Be careful how you build, because the strength of your life depends on how you build.”

Now the immediate application is to pastors, teachers and other spiritual leaders need to be careful how we help people build upon the foundation of Christ.

But ultimately we are each responsible for the construction of our own lives in Christ. The way we live, the habits we form, the things we do, all form the building materials.

Now according to v.12 there are two categories of building materials.

- The first category of building materials is permanent ... gold, silver, costly stones. The "costly stones" could have been jewels like rubies, diamonds, or emeralds, etc. Or it could refer to those large foundation stones carved out of granite or marble that could be put upon the foundation to raise the walls and complete the edifice.

So these are building materials that are uncommon because they are difficult to acquire. They are costly for the same reason. And they endure over time.

- The second category is just the opposite ... wood, hay and straw. Now if you want to build fast and easy this is the way to go, because these materials are everywhere, and they're cheap. But the down side is that they don't last very long.

So what does this have to do with our life in Christ? It represents two different ways to "work on your soul" ... two different ways to go about living your life. The way we live, the habits we form, the things we do, all form the building materials.

- Gold, silver, and costly stones represent the life that is built (lived) for the glory of God and for the good of others.
- Wood, hay and straw represent the life that is built (lived) for the pleasures of this world and the glory of self.

So every day we live, our lives are under construction.

By the way, this is a good reminder to us that we are all "under construction." This means we should slow down in the construction zone. Be patient with the mess.

Now this is all so important because of the next thing we see in our text.

3. THE INSPECTION OF OUR LIFE IN CHRIST (vv.13-15)

Now you can go about your life and think only about what makes you happy right now. But the Bible tells us that there is day coming when it will all be tested and evaluated.

1 Corinthians 3:13-15 - his work will be shown for what it is, because the Day will bring it to light. It will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test the quality of each man's work. 14 If what he has built survives, he will receive his reward. 15 If it is burned up, he will suffer loss; he himself will be saved, but only as one escaping through the flames.

Note: We are saved by grace, not by works. Our acceptance is not based upon our performance but the finished work of Christ. But works are very important.

Ephesians 2:10 - For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.

Now let's just take these verses apart and see if we can understand what happens:

“His work will be shown for what it is, because the Day will bring it to light...” – What is the “Day”? It is the return of Jesus Christ. At that time our lives will come into the light before God.

“It will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test the quality of each man’s work.”

This refers to what Paul talks about in the second letter to the Corinthians.

2 Corinthians 5:10 - For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive what is due him for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad.

The “we” refers to Christians. Our salvation is not judged based upon our works. It is judged solely upon whether or not we put our faith in Christ for eternal life.

But then God wants to reward us for the way we have built our lives.

“If what he has built survives, he will receive his reward.”

So after every thought, every word, every deed goes through the refining fire of God’s all-knowing, all-seeing gaze, what remains becomes the basis for our rewards.

Now what are these rewards? We aren’t told specifically in the Bible. But we have some clues.

Remember the parable of the servants who received talents that they were in turn to go and invest and bring a profit for their master? One received 5, another 2, and another 1. For the servants give 5 & 2 talents, they invested well and brought a return for their master.

Matthew 25:21 - “His master replied, ‘Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master’s happiness!’

- **Rewards come in the form of affirmation.** The master in this parable says “Well done, good and faithful servant!”
- **Rewards come in the form of responsibility.** The master says, “You have been faithful with a few things, now I’ll put you in charge of many things.”

ILLUSTRATION – Maybe it’s like a basketball or baseball team. Once you have made the team the issue is not over. Then the question becomes, “who will start? Who will receive the most playing time?” Those who can contribute the most to the success of the team will play the most. You are a member of Christ’s team through faith. Then the issue becomes, “Who will contribute the most to His Kingdom?”

- **Rewards come in the form of joy in the presence of God.** The master says to the faithful servants, “Come and share the joy of your master.”

Now look at v.15.

“If it is burned up, he will suffer loss; he himself will be saved, but only as one escaping through the flames.”

Now this is puzzling to us. If heaven is heaven, then there’s no sorrow there, but some of us will enter heaven “as one escaping through the fire.”

ILLUSTRATION – My senior year in college I was ready to finish. I had crammed four years into five ... mostly playing guitars and ping pong at the Baptist Student Center. But I was called to ministry and it was time to finish and get on to seminary. I got special permission to take 20 hours my last semester. And one class was tough. I barely passed, but I graduated. I wasn’t proud of that grade, but I was glad to graduate.

And that’s the way it will be for some believers in that Day.

But now I want you see even more why we must be careful how we build.

4. THE CONSECRATION OF OUR LIFE IN CHRIST (vv.16-17)

1 Corinthians 3:16-17 - Don’t you know that you yourselves are God’s temple and that God’s Spirit lives in you? 17 If anyone destroys God’s temple, God will destroy him; for God’s temple is sacred, and you are that temple.

POINT – In vv.16-17 the reason the foundation, construction and inspection is so important is that what is being constructed is dwelling of the Holy God. This “building” is important because of Who lives in it.

Ephesians 2:20-22 - built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone. 21 In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord. 22 And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit.

You see the way we build and live our lives makes room for one of two things ... people see a lot of God, or a lot of me.

Which is it? When people look at us do they see lots of God ... or lots of a sinful human being?