

1 Corinthians 3:10-11, 16-23 ¹⁰ By the grace God has given me, I laid a foundation as an expert builder, and someone else is building on it. But each one should be careful how he builds. ¹¹ For no one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ... ¹⁶ 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. ¹⁸ Do not deceive yourselves. If any one of you thinks he is wise by the standards of this age, he should become a "fool" so that he may become wise. ¹⁹ For the wisdom of this world is foolishness in God's sight. As it is written: "He catches the wise in their craftiness"; ²⁰ and again, "The Lord knows that the thoughts of the wise are futile." ²¹ So then, no more boasting about men! All things are yours, ²² whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas or the world or life or death or the present or the future—all are yours, ²³ and you are of Christ, and Christ is of God.

You Are God's Temple

I'm sure that most of you have been around a building project. It's always an exciting time. To see your certain project get started might only be surpassed by the satisfaction of the project's completion. Between those events, the workers labor at their given tasks to get the job done. One starts, another puts up wall, some put on the roof, others do the detail work inside until the whole building is complete. All work together to complete the project. Yet, it would never get going if not for a foundation being laid.

Paul pointed out the Corinthians that they were a temple building project. The goal of the project was to bring people together as a congregation to praise and thank God for the price Jesus paid to forgive the sins of the world. For the project God had called different types of ministers to perform different services, but they were all still one in their ministry. How important it is to be one in their service. They must be one in their faithfulness to the gospel.

Paul was the founder of the congregation. God chose him to lay the foundation for the Corinthians. God gave him the gift to be an expert church builder of mission congregations. By God's grace, Paul got to be the one to clear a spot and get the project going. He knew this work of being a missionary. And he built every one of his congregations on a good foundation, on Jesus Christ and him crucified.

Other builders followed Paul in Corinth. They didn't start fresh but built on the same foundation of Jesus the Savior's death on the cross to pay for the sins of the world. If the congregation was to remain a true Christian congregation, those pastors had to build carefully on that foundation. Like the founder, they too must preach Christ crucified as the only way of salvation. Some had the work to build the congregation such as gathering more people to unite around God's Word as the congregation grew in numbers. Some guided people into how they might also be part of the work of witnessing to the people around them. Others would have trained on how they might use their gifts to serve within the congregation. Yet, all were to be careful about where they built.

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God used all those builders. Even will that care being taken to build, the congregation was in danger that ministers would be tempted to build human wisdom on the gospel of Jesus Christ. Many of their hearers would have liked nothing better. They would be tempted to do what so many pastors in erring church bodies are doing today, offering the wisdom of men to their people in addition to or even in place of the wisdom of God. This wisdom opposes the wisdom that comes from God. The worldly-wise think they don't need a Savior instead they attach the strength of their faith-walls to their efforts. To what they have done in the name of their church. Such false wisdom is a trap for them. It's a trap that destroys eternally. It causes what is built on Christ to weaken and come crashing down.

Picture it this way. If we were to focus on our efforts to build support for our salvation it would be like taking the foundation out from under this church. The wall and roof might stay upright for a while. The inside might not seem to change all that much. We might feel that we still have a beautiful faith and hope but it would all come crashing down. When we boast in our accomplishments or what we have done to build faith and stand impressed by what we have been able to achieve as a congregation or individuals, we build on the wrong place and take our faith off of Christ and him crucified.

You are that building. You are the temple of God. **Don't you know that you yourselves are God's temple and that God's Spirit lives in you? If anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy him; for God's temple is sacred, and you are that temple.** God encourages you to live as that temple firmly grounded on Christ and him crucified so that your hope of salvation will not collapse. God doesn't want you to desecrate yourself and lose your foundation. He warns you against tottering from your foundation of Christ because he destroys what is not built on Christ.

There is also another encouragement for us, especially for those who have influence over others. Do not destroy one of God's temples by building into them the weak wisdom of the world. That means anytime we have strove to teach any other knowledge while neglecting the true knowledge of the faith founded on Christ, we have brought in our weakness. Any time we have taken confidence in anything we have done, we have desecrated a temple of God. Any time we have served ourselves rather than serving God, we have been sinful builders ruining what God has established.

It is God who has made us sacred. But he has sharp warning to watch out for everything that might weaken his church. God wants unity and strength. False teaching divides, disrupts, and shatters unity. God encourages you to be holy. To live as the temple you are founded on Christ guided by the Holy Spirit on the true wisdom of forgiveness of sins.

Paul now returns to that thought because it was at the heart of the divisions in Corinth. **Do not deceive yourselves. If any one of you thinks he is wise by the standards of this age, he should become a “fool” so that he may become wise.** Paul told them that they should become fools in the eyes of the world. For the world considers the message of the cross to be foolishness. But that foolishness is the only way of salvation. The world considers it foolish to believe that the Son of God became man to die the death of a common criminal for the sins of the world. But that foolishness is the only way to heaven.

The worldly-wise think that they don't need a Savior, that they can earn their own way. But God "catches them in their craftiness" (Job 5:13). Their false wisdom is a trap for them. It's a trap that destroys them eternally. Why would anyone once they have the wisdom of salvation through Jesus, want to follow after the wisdom of the world which can't save? God alone can reveal heaven and the pathway to heaven. And that way is through his Son. The wisest of the wise cannot find heaven's door. The greatest intellects cannot discover God's plan of salvation. For "the thoughts of the wise are futile" (Ps 94:11).

Paul wrote to warn that God judges differently than the people of this world. Some among the Corinthians had been impressed with the eloquence, wisdom and of their teachers. But they were impressed with the wrong things. God's wisdom is far more important than any human gifts and abilities. They were boasting in men instead of in God. They were bragging about what men could do instead of what God has done. Their boasting in men had led to divisions in the congregation and strife.

The Corinthians were robbing themselves of God's gifts. By attaching themselves to one leader or another they were missing out on what the other leaders had to offer. God had sent different men to Corinth for the building up of the saints there (cf. Eph 4:11–13). But the various groups in the congregation were making themselves poor by claiming to be the followers of one or another instead of enjoying all of them as God's gifts. Nothing can tear apart a congregation more quickly than when one group in the church gathers around the personality of one called worker in opposition to another. What a misuse of God's gifts—to use them to tear apart rather than to build up!

As beloved children of God all things are yours, Paul writes. Everything must serve us and God's gracious purpose. The whole world is at our disposal to use to God's glory and to further his cause. Christians have only God and Christ above them. Everything else, past, present and future is for us to use according to God's plan and purpose. Our lives are gifts from God and dedicated to his glory. Even death must serve us. For it is our gateway to Paradise.

There is no room for partisan politics and party wrangling in the church. Factions rob the church of the wealth God has given. It robs people of the service of pastors and teachers whom God has given to lead them to eternal life. We have been built up as temple of the Holy Spirit. He lives within us and he binds us together in one mission. To grow in faith and live for him. To be wise with holy Christian living. May God preserve that spirit of unity, cooperation and appreciation in our congregation!