

“God’s Temple on the Foundation of Faith”

1 Corinthians 3:10-23 Epiphany 7A 2-19-17

As we finish our series on Paul’s letter to the Corinthians we end where we began. We remember who we are in order to be motivated to holy living. Paul opened this letter with these words, *To the church of God that is in Corinth, to those sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints together with all those who in every place call upon the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.*

He reminded them of their call to be holy and to reflect the character of God who made them holy. Holiness is a standard to which we aspire, but first it is a status that is ascribed to us through the purifying blood of Christ. It sets us apart from the world in what we believe and how we behave.

Leviticus described holy living toward the poor, the sojourner, and others. We heard the refrain “I am the Lord”, which God said in the preface to the Ten Commandments. Since He their Lord brought them out of Egypt, they were not to live again as slaves to the sins of those who were not his people.

In Matthew Jesus calls God’s people to love not just their neighbor but also their enemies—to go literally the extra mile for those who hate them and to pray for those who persecute them. By this they would show themselves to be holy. In explaining the Creed, Luther taught that Christ made us holy with his precious blood so *“that we may live with him in his kingdom and serve him in everlasting righteousness, innocence, and blessedness.”*

In our epistle Paul says, <sup>16</sup>*Do you not know that you are God’s temple and that God’s Spirit dwells in you? ... God’s temple is holy, and you are that temple.* Those who are baptized in Christ have forgiveness of sins and the Holy Spirit. We are the dwelling place of God.

Therefore, as holy people in whom God’s Spirit dwells, we are to take care how we build on the foundation of that temple. The one and true foundation is the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Paul is not talking about different foundations, but different ways that we build on the foundation.

Building on it with precious stones means that we faithfully learn, grow, teach, and live by the Word of God. To build with lesser quality materials is to mix truth with error, resulting in weakness, confusion and little fruit, though not outright loss of faith.

This reminds of the children’s story of the 3 little pigs. They each build a house, but the first two were lazy and carefree. The first built his house out of straw, and the second out of sticks. The big bad wolf easily blew both houses down. The first pig barely escaped to the second house. When the wolf blew down that house they both narrowly escaped to the third pig’s house. That pig was more diligent in how he built. His house, made of bricks, the wolf could not destroy.

In the church, we are to carefully and faithfully build on the foundation of Christ with sound teaching and sincere faith that produces good works. That church will withstand both the capricious and fierce winds of false doctrine that dilute the Gospel and result in fruitless living. We don’t want to barely escape the flames of hell with nothing left to show of our works.

The worst outcome Paul describes is that the church is destroyed by false doctrine that leads people completely away from the saving Gospel of Christ. That happens when people turn to themselves as the arbiter of truth. They may claim to build on the foundation of Christ, be the Church outwardly, but interpret God’s Word to mean what is reasonable to them, what aligns with their desires, and what makes them feel like good people. They hold fast to what appeals to their mind, their flesh, and their pride. The foundation is still there, for Christ and His Word will never be overcome, but they are destroyed.

So we end where we started. By God’s grace in Christ we are set apart, saints perfected by the blood of Christ to be His children. In him we have salvation and in none other. For the sake of our souls, and for the sake of others who will follow, therefore, we build on that foundation with truth that will stand. We stand as God’s temple, we stand by faith on the foundation of Christ. Amen.