

What Are We Building?

1 Corinthians 3:1-15

Introduction

Spiritual Review: (Last week), natural vs. spiritual.

- We think spiritual = otherworldly, invisible, esoteric, mystical, and private.
- Paul reminds us that spiritual = led by, connected to, animated by the Spirit of God (HS).
 - Therefore, in some sense, *all of life is spiritual*, not just prayers, gathering with the church, etc. but also conversations with friends, your job, driving your car (talk about needing prayer, driving in Philly will make you pray), paying bills, doing laundry, studying for school, etc.
- It's not just your *spiritual* life we are concerned with because *all of life is spiritual* (because all of it should be led by the Spirit of God).
 - E.g., OT laws cover everything (dinnerware, schedule, clothing, etc.).
 - We've been told we can separate the sacred and the secular. I have my *God* time and my *work* time and my *personal* time and my *friend* time, etc. We compartmentalize God from most of our life. *He is Lord of all*. You should be submitting all of your life to him. He should be directing every step of your life.
- All of life is meant to be lived for Christ, then what kind of life are you living?

Pick Two: Cheap, good, or fast (pick two). "Buy cheap, buy often." Some things you want to buy cheap but others you want to last (e.g., furniture, car, heart surgery). Our house needs some cosmetic work on the inside but it's been around for (almost) 100 years. It's made out of Wissahickon stone and it's not going anywhere.

- What kind of work for Christ are we building? What kind of church are we building?

¹ But I, brothers, could not address you as spiritual people, but as people of the flesh, as infants in Christ. ² I fed you with milk, not solid food, for you were not ready for it. And even now you are not yet ready, ³ for you are still of the flesh. For while there is jealousy and strife among you, are you not of the flesh and behaving only in a human way? ⁴ For when one says, "I follow Paul," and another, "I follow Apollos," are you not being merely human? ⁵ What then is Apollos? What is Paul? Servants through whom you believed, as the Lord assigned to each. ⁶ I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth. ⁷ So neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God who gives the growth. ⁸ He who plants and he who waters are one, and each will receive his wages according to his labor. ⁹ For we are God's fellow workers. You are God's field, God's building. ¹⁰ According to the grace of God given to me, like a skilled master builder I laid a foundation, and someone else is building upon it. Let each one take care how he builds upon it. ¹¹ For no one can lay a foundation other than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. ¹² Now if anyone builds on the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw— ¹³ each one's work will become manifest, for the Day will disclose it, because it will be revealed by fire, and the fire will test what sort of work each one has done. ¹⁴ If the work that anyone has built on

the foundation survives, he will receive a reward. ¹⁵ If anyone's work is burned up, he will suffer loss, though he himself will be saved, but only as through fire.¹

1. Infantile Thinking (vv. 1-4)

Baby Believers: ¹ But I, brothers, could not address you as spiritual people, but as people of the flesh, as infants in Christ. When Paul first came to Corinth, he couldn't talk to them as mature, grown-up Christians.

- This makes sense, they were new to the faith. Being mature in the faith doesn't mean you are better, it just means you are further down the road (e.g., me vs. my child).
- Convinced of this, I know that I will remain and continue with you all, for your progress and joy in the faith (Phil 1:25). Practice these things, immerse yourself in them, so that all may see your progress (1 Tim 4:15).

At the Right Time: ² I fed you with milk, not solid food, for you were not ready for it. They wanted mature teaching but they were not ready (e.g., child wanting something they're not ready for; cf. lawn darts).

- A good parents feeds a child appropriately (milk at the right time, solid at the right time) and helps a child grow and mature (e.g., ride your bike, take your medicine, be responsible).
- Paul started with the basics because he knew what they could handle and loved them enough to teach them appropriately (e.g., don't expect someone to get where you are in 40 minutes if it took you 40 years).

Still Not Ready: And even now you are not yet ready, ³ The problem isn't that they were infants but that they *still* are infants. They have not matured. They're years into Jesus and still not ready to digest deeper gospel truths.

- Time with Jesus is an opportunity for maturity, not a guarantee (how did you invest that time)? One of the saddest things I see is someone who has been a Christian for a long time and yet they are still infantile and immature in their attitude and behavior.
 - The problem isn't that infants in the faith exist, but that those who shouldn't be infants still are (e.g., child breastfeeding; how old? 48/60/72 mos.).
 - "An immature Christian is hard to please and easy to offend" (Smethurst).

¹ ¹ Κάγω, ἀδελφοί, οὐκ ἠδυνήθην λαλῆσαι ὑμῖν ὡς πνευματικοῖς ἀλλ' ὡς σαρκίνοις, ὡς νηπίοις ἐν Χριστῷ. ² γάλα ὑμᾶς ἐπότισα, οὐ βρῶμα· οὕτω γὰρ ἐδύνασθε. ἀλλ' οὐδὲ ἔτι νῦν δύνασθε, ³ ἔτι γὰρ σαρκικοί ἐστε. ὅπου γὰρ ἐν ὑμῖν ζῆλος καὶ ἔρις, οὐχὶ σαρκικοί ἐστε καὶ κατὰ ἄνθρωπον περιπατεῖτε; ⁴ ὅταν γὰρ λέγη τις, Ἐγὼ μὲν εἰμι Παύλου, ἕτερος δὲ, Ἐγὼ Ἀπολλῶ, οὐκ ἄνθρωποι ἐστε; ⁵ τί οὖν ἐστὶν Ἀπολλῶς; τί δὲ ἐστὶν Παύλος; διάκονοι δὲ ὧν ἐπιστεύσατε, καὶ ἐκάστῳ ὡς ὁ κύριος ἔδωκεν. ⁶ ἐγὼ ἐφύτευσα, Ἀπολλῶς ἐπότισεν, ἀλλὰ ὁ θεὸς ἠύξανεν· ⁷ ὥστε οὔτε ὁ φυτεύων ἐστὶν τι οὔτε ὁ ποτίζων ἀλλ' ὁ αὐξάνων θεός. ⁸ ὁ φυτεύων δὲ καὶ ὁ ποτίζων ἐν εἰσιν, ἕκαστος δὲ τὸν ἴδιον μισθὸν λήμψεται κατὰ τὸν ἴδιον κόπον· ⁹ θεοῦ γὰρ ἐσμεν συνεργοί, θεοῦ γεώργιον, θεοῦ οἰκοδομή ἐστε. ¹⁰ Κατὰ τὴν χάριν τοῦ θεοῦ τὴν δοθεῖσάν μοι ὡς σοφὸς ἀρχιτέκτων θεμέλιον ἔθηκα, ἄλλος δὲ ἐποικοδομεῖ. ἕκαστος δὲ βλεπέτω πῶς ἐποικοδομεῖ. ¹¹ θεμέλιον γὰρ ἄλλον οὐδεὶς δύναται θεῖναι παρὰ τὸν κείμενον, ὅς ἐστιν Ἰησοῦς Χριστός. ¹² εἰ δὲ τις ἐποικοδομεῖ ἐπὶ τὸν θεμέλιον χρυσόν, ἄργυρον, λίθους τιμίους, ξύλα, χόρτον, καλάμην, ¹³ ἐκάστου τὸ ἔργον φανερόν γενήσεται, ἡ γὰρ ἡμέρα δηλώσει, ὅτι ἐν πυρὶ ἀποκαλύπτεται· καὶ ἐκάστου τὸ ἔργον ὅποιόν ἐστιν τὸ πῦρ [αὐτὸ] δοκιμάσει. ¹⁴ εἰ τις τὸ ἔργον μενεῖ ὁ ἐποικοδόμησεν, μισθὸν λήμψεται· ¹⁵ εἴ τις τὸ ἔργον κατακαήσεται, ζημιωθήσεται,

Fleshly: for you are still of the flesh There are two words for flesh (σαρκίνος vs. σαρκικός). One is ontological (made of flesh) and the other is behavioral (characterized by the flesh). The Corinthians no longer are *made* of flesh (spiritual) but their behavior continues to be dominated by the flesh.

- Some have coined the term “carnal Christian” to describe this (carnal = flesh; cf. carne asada, incarnation, etc.). “If you've got the disease of carnality, people know it.”
- It's also a lifestyle that can't be sustained for long. When you live contrary to your nature it creates dissonance (conviction, unhappiness, out of balance). You're living by the old script.

Evidence of Sin: For while there is jealousy and strife among you, are you not of the flesh and behaving only in a human way? What is the primary evidence of their worldly ways? Jealousy and strife.

- ¹⁶ But I say, **walk by the Spirit**, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh. ¹⁷ For the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh, for these are opposed to each other, to keep you from doing the things you want to do. ¹⁸ But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law. ¹⁹ Now the works of the flesh are evident: sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, ²⁰ idolatry, sorcery, enmity, **strife, jealousy**, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, ²¹ envy, drunkenness, orgies, and things like these. I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God. ²² But the **fruit of the Spirit** is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, ²³ gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law. ²⁴ And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. ²⁵ **If we live by the Spirit, let us also keep in step with the Spirit.** ²⁶ Let us not become conceited, provoking one another, envying one another (Gal 5:16-26).
 - We are called to act different (fruit of the Spirit) yet we're acting just like the world. Our values, media habits, relationships look no different than the fallen world.
 - We should love our neighbors differently.
 - We should care for the broken differently.
 - We should spend our money differently.
 - We should use our time differently.
 - We should cope with anxiety differently.
 - **One reason the world doesn't believe our message is because, too often, we don't live like we believe it either.**
- Why is jealousy and strife “fleshly” or “human” instead of spiritual?
 - It's the way people think in their sinful state (“you're still living the old way”).
- Jealousy is the word we get the word “zeal” from (ζήλος). It's a type of unrestrained passion. Enthusiasm without knowledge.
 - It's following your passions and convictions without wisdom from the Spirit of God. This often leads to strife and discord.
- A primary result of the fall (sin) is **competition**. We constantly compare ourselves to others. We can't enjoy the success of others unless we are doing better. We feel that

someone else has to lose so we can win. It's a survival of the fittest mentality (those in power deserve to be there). True gospel love can sincerely want the best for someone else and celebrate when the best happens.

- This is the danger of tribalism. This is the way that power shows itself in our world today. We have to alienate and destroy others to feel like we are winning.
- That's a difference between Christian contentment and worldly competition. The worldly way of thinking never enjoys what you have or experience, only that you have more or do more than others. **It's not real pleasure.**

Human Way: ⁴ For when one says, "I follow Paul," and another, "I follow Apollos," are you not being merely human? This is "human thinking" (the way of the world). I was discipled by *the* (name drop) Paul. *Apollos* is the best teacher. (e.g., clout chasing).

- You cannot borrow someone's holiness. You aren't more godly for who you know. You want the position and power that comes from these leaders without pursuing the godliness or humility their message demands. **You want the experience rather than the meaning** (e.g., prayer meeting).

- It's not about God or godliness, it's about you. This is ego centric behavior. And who is more egocentric than a baby (feed me, change me, burp me, hold me, etc.). Me church.

Warning: There is a warning in this. If this is how you live your life, constantly at odds with others, everything revolves around you, demanding grace for yourself but refusing to extend it to others, then be warned. You are either out of step with the Spirit of God or don't have him at all.

- You are either a disobedient child, or not a child at all.
- **When you look at your life, what do you see? Do you see a life that looks like the deeds of the flesh or the fruit of the Spirit?**
- ***Warning*** If you are his, God will not allow you to stay in a place of carnality. He always finishes what he starts (Phil 1:6). He disciplines those he loves (Rev 3:19).
 - When God calls you to repentance, you should turn from your sin and trust him. He will smash your idols. He will break you to save you. **Like a good surgeon, he will harm you to heal you.** Do not regard his discipline lightly (Heb 12:5).

2. Correct Perspective (vv. 5-9)

Recalibrate View of Leaders: ⁵ What then is Apollos? What is Paul? Servants through whom you believed, as the Lord assigned to each. Leaders are important, they are biblical. God *gives* the church leaders. But leadership in God's church is still service. Leaders are servants. The leaders serve the church (not the other way around).

- Leaders matter, structure matters, polity matters but they are not the goal, they are tools that God uses to build his church.
- Paul makes the point clearly (describing himself), not "who" but "what" is Apollos or Paul? They are simply servants doing what God assigned them to do.
- It's not about you! Do what **God** has assigned you to do (not what you want to do, not what you prefer to do, what God has called you to do).

Godward Vision: ⁶ I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth.

- When we take our eyes off of ourselves and put them on God, it gives us the perspective we need. A proper view of God keeps us in our place.
 - We tend to err either on the side of pride (superiority) or despair (inferiority). We often think too high of ourselves or too low of ourselves. But in most cases we are *constantly thinking of ourselves*.
 - The solution to superiority is not inferiority but humility (the proper view of who we are in light of who he is). And the solution to inferiority is not superiority but trust (the proper response to God's love for us). The outcome of such gospel living is **humble confidence** (humble because we can't earn God's love but confident because we can't lose it).
- You have part to play in God's work (to plant, to water, etc.) but the results are in God's hands. You and I are called to be faithful in the ministry God has given us, not worry about controlling the outcome.
 - A farmer can't control the weather.

Acknowledge God: ⁷ So neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God who gives the growth. We will not and cannot be useful for the KoG until we recognize that all of our effort is in vain without God. He is the one that "will[s] and work[s] for his good pleasure" (Phil 2:13). As John the Baptist reminds us: "A person cannot receive even one thing unless it is given him from heaven" (Jn 3:27).

- We need to stop and recognize where all the real power and authority is. It is not in our schemes, intelligence, obedience, or faithfulness.
- Their attention shouldn't be on these teachers (no matter how good) but on God.
 - **Where is your attention?** When you build your faith on fallen human beings (even the best ones) you will eventually be disappointed.

Acknowledge God: ⁸ He who plants and he who waters are one, and each will receive his wages according to his labor. ⁹ For we are God's fellow workers. You are God's field, God's building. So, as Christians we are not in competition but in partnership. We are coworkers (συνεργοί), partners together working for God. We are all needy and needed with an important part to play in God's plan.

- Our hope is fixed only and always on God (not a pastor or personality). God's fellow workers, God's field, God's building (θεοῦ γάρ ἐσμεν συνεργοί, θεοῦ γεώργιον, θεοῦ οἰκοδομή ἐστε.) God comes first.
- He is the master, we are the servants.

3. Lasting Work (vv. 10-15)

Paul's Work: ¹⁰ According to the grace of God given to me, like a skilled master builder I laid a foundation, and someone else is building upon it. He transitions from the farming metaphor to the building metaphor.

- Paul laid a good foundation like "wise architect" (σοφὸς ἀρχιτέκτων), still only by God's grace.. **He did his part and now others are called to do their part.** We all have a part

to play in building God's church (in Corinthin, in Philly, etc.). **What kind of church are we building?** This section might be specific to teachers in the church but is clearly and easily applicable to all of us (e.g., we are all God's temple, 3:16-17)

Be Careful: Let each one take care how he builds upon it.

- Jesus + or Jesus alone? Do we feel we need to help him out? Jazz it up. Make him relevant? He is the most relevant!

Foundation: ¹¹ For no one can lay a foundation other than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. The deeper the foundation, the stronger it is. **Jesus Christ is the only secure foundation on which to build my life (Matt 7:24-29).**

- Foundations are funny because they aren't the most visible part of the house, but they are the most important. They are the unseen but essential component to a strong building.
 - To often, most people focus on the cosmetics of the rather than the "bones" (e.g., HGTV "House Hunters" worried about the paint color rather than location, layout, foundation, etc.).
- Too often we take the foundation for granted and focus on all the cosmetics (e.g., a nice little two story house can go away and no one cares but a massive cathedral will be missed).
 - **Where is our foundation? Is it really on Christ?** Or something else (status quo, power, tradition, etc.).

Building Materials: ¹² Now if anyone builds on the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw—

- Christ is the foundation. There can be nothing else. **Now, how are we building on this firm foundation?**
 - With good materials (gold, silver, precious stones) or poor materials (wood, hay, straw). Cheap materias or valuable materials. Things that exalt Christ or simply amuse us.
 - Worshiptainment? Busyness? **Bumper cars vs. train tracks.** Are we going somewhere and building something or just having a good time and making a lot of noise.

Revealed: ¹³ each one's work will become manifest, for the Day will disclose it, because it will be revealed by fire, and the fire will test what sort of work each one has done.

- The beauty of the gospel is that we can stand before God and be judged based on the work of Christ. That's why we need our sin judged on Calvary rather than judgment day).
- Our righteousness will be determined by our relationship with Christ. Either we will be righteous because of our faith in him or we will be punished because of our rejection of him.
- For those in Christ, your status as his child is never in doubt but the contribution of your life is still to be determined. At the Day of the Lord, the judgment seat of Christ, all that we have done will be revealed for what it is. Every hidden motive will be exposed.

- There is nothing hidden from God. He is not fooled by your divided allegiance and ulterior motives. And on that day, all that is false will be burned away like the impurities in metal refined by fire.
- Only one life, 'twill soon be past, Only what's done for Christ will last (C. T. Studd).
- *There is an individual and corporate component. Each of us are building, but what are we building on God's foundation? The church.
 - That's why we believe in Church planting. The *church* is who Christ "loved and gave himself up for" (Eph 5:25); the "wisdom of God" is made known through the church (Eph 3:10); the church is what God has promised to build and called us to build!

Survive: ¹⁴ If the work that anyone has built on the foundation survives, he will receive a reward.

¹⁵ If anyone's work is burned up, he will suffer loss, though he himself will be saved, but only as through fire.

- E.g., Florida neighborhood surviving hurricane Ian. 25 feet higher. Self-contained drainage, water, solar power, specific vegetation, etc. Only lost a few fence posts (compared to other neighborhoods which, out of ignorance or selfishness built what they wanted not what was best).
 - What is the lasting work we want to build our church on?
 - Word of God.
 - Gospel of God.
 - Power of God.
 - Simple faith, not manipulative promises.
 - Dependent faith, not human ingenuity.
 - Transformative faith, not behavior modification.

Conclusion:

- **(1) Foundation:** What are you building your life on? If it is not Christ, you not only lack his joy, presence, and guidance now you will lack eternity with him and instead will be separated from him and punished forever.
- **(2) Building:** If you are "in Christ" are you using your life to build his kingdom? Are you investing in his mission? Are you using your time, gifts, resources to build something that will last? Are you investing in eternal reward or temporary comfort?
 - When you stand before the Lord on judgment day will you see the eternal impact of your life or will you be disappointed to watch how you spent your life burn away?