

The Foundation of Christ

1Cor 3.11-15

You may have noticed that we changed the worship format a little bit this morning. We thought it might be good to take time today to *think* about **worship** itself. Why we do it? And what are we doing? We're hoping a change of pace and a quieter mood for today might help us do that.

Last week we learned about *ownership* – that God *owns* us – that we *belong* to Him; we owe everything to Him. He has done all the work to save and redeem us, to purchase a people for Himself by the cross. But in learning about *ownership*, we actually learned something about *worship* too.

Harold Best says worship is “acknowledging that someone or something else is greater [than us] – *worth more* – and by consequence, to be obeyed, feared, and adored... Worship is the sign that in giving myself completely to someone or something, *I want to be mastered by it.*”¹ Isn't that a great way to look at worship?

Bob Kauflin, who wrote some of the songs we sing, says this: “We *want* to be mastered by the objects of our worship... We worship whatever rules our time, energy, thoughts, longings, and choices.”² Psalm 115 says, “**Those who make [idols] become like them; so do all who trust in them.**”³

Now, idolatry is normally a **bad** thing; but we actually want to idolize God.

We want to become like Him.

We want to *trust* in Him and *know* him.

We want to worship God with all our heart, mind, soul, and strength.

And as Warren Wiersbe puts it, we want to do that in response to “what God **is** and **says** and **does.**”⁴ That's where worship song lyrics can help us to worship God well: they tell us about who God is, and what He has said and done.

So as we continue to worship God this morning in word and song, let's surrender to Him; let's be *mastered* by Him, because He is our Lord and Savior. He is our heavenly Father, the One who has *loved* us with an *everlasting* love. (Jer 31.3)
And of course, this is Father's Day.

¹ Harold Best, [Music Through the Eyes of Faith](#), p. 143.

² <http://www.worshipmatters.com/2005/11/04/defining-worship/>

³ ([Psa. 115:8, ESV](#))

⁴ Warren Wiersbe, [Real Worship](#), p. 26

PRAYER

Please turn to 1st Corinthians, chapter 3, verses 9-15. I'm going back to verse 9 so that we can see how Paul's description ties the building to its foundation.

We are co-workers belonging to God. 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, but someone else builds on it. And each one must be careful how he builds.¹¹ For no one can lay any foundation other than what is being laid, which is Jesus Christ.¹² If anyone builds on the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones – wood, hay, or straw –¹³ each builder's work will be plainly seen, for the Day will make it clear, because it will be revealed by fire. And the fire will test what kind of work each has done.¹⁴ If what someone has built survives, he will receive a reward.¹⁵ If someone's work is burned up, he will suffer loss. He himself will be saved, but only as through fire. (1Co 3:9^{NET})

My parents were young adults when the Great Depression hit in 1929. It left them scarred, with disturbing images in their minds; it instilled in them a profound distrust, and left behind shattered dreams. Everything they thought was rock solid turned out to be shifting sands – empty promises. So my mother used to tell me, “don't put all your eggs in one basket, honey.” And my dad told me, “keep a bunch of irons in the fire son, because you never know which one is going to get hot.” They were passing on to me *good worldly wisdom*. But they were also instilling in me their own fear that you can never know what's going to happen, so *keep your options open*. They were telling me never to commit myself entirely to *anything* or *anyone*. My dad used to say, “No one's gonna take care of you son; you've gotta take care of yourself.” Distrust. Fear. Self-reliance. Those were my heritage.

But Paul, by contrast, has been telling the Corinthians to TRUST in Christ, and *not* in *worldly* wisdom; to have a *spiritual* mind, not a *fleshly* mind; and to think with *godly* wisdom. He's telling them here in this passage that there is only one foundation from which to build *any* lasting monument. Essentially he's saying that when it comes to trusting Christ, you *must* put all your eggs in one basket – there *must* be only one iron in the fire – because *Jesus Christ is absolutely unique*, and *absolutely to be trusted*. Understanding the uniqueness of Christ is crucial: *no one comes to the Father but by Christ*. We don't just end up with the Father. We *come* to him by Christ. That's because *God designed salvation to glorify the Son, so the Son would glorify the Father who sent him* (John 17.1). Our salvation depends *entirely* on the work of Christ on the cross. Our sanctification – the way we are transformed into the image of Christ – depends *entirely* on the work of Christ's

Spirit in us. Our glorification – our eternal perfection in Christ – depends **entirely** on Christ being made Head over all. So that for us, ultimately, **to live IS Christ**.

²² And God placed all things under his feet, **and** appointed him to be head over everything for the church,²³ which is his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way. (Eph 1:22-23 ^{NIV})

That's what it means to lay the only foundation that *can* be laid, which is Christ. If we don't see Christ as the ONLY way of salvation, as uniquely qualified to save, then how can we put our trust in him alone? Our faith will become a *tentative* faith, **which is no faith at all**. We will *tentatively* commit to a church; *tentatively* submit to an elder; and *tentatively* fellowship with others. And then it's a short hop to *tentatively* commit to Jesus Christ in proclaiming the Gospel; *tentatively* submit to his Lordship in obedience; and *tentatively* fellowship with him in prayer and Bible-study. **The work we do in his name will not last if we build tentatively, and with short-term materials** – employing and building things that will be consumed or swept away in the trials that God will surely send us to test our work.

We must not fashion our image, our *perception* of Christ, according to our view of men and of the world around us. My earthly father's image of life was distorted by his experience of life – it determined the way he thought about *everything*. We must not fashion God from the image of our earthly fathers either. If we do, then our trust in God, our faith in Christ, may become fickle and unsubstantial. We begin to think that if it can all be swept away, then we might as well build cheap, with throw-away materials that don't cost us much. And then we apply that worldly principle to the way we live in the kingdom. When we do that, **we are thinking with a fleshly mind, not a spiritual mind**. A spiritual mind is a faith-filled mind, a trusting mind, a submissive worshipful mind; it is centered on what **has already been done on the cross**. And what was done on the cross **cannot** be changed; it **cannot** be swept away. It is safe and secure for us in the risen Christ.

This passage therefore has these two main points for us to consider:

- First, laying the foundation of Christ, *and*
- Secondly, building on that Foundation.

I think it's pretty clear that Paul is referring to Christ's description of building a house on sand instead of on the Rock. **It's all about the foundation we stand on**.

²² Many will say to me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and in your name drive out demons and perform many miracles?'

²³ Then I will tell them plainly, 'I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!'

²⁴ "**Therefore** [notice that Christ ties the following description to the **work** of these men]. *Therefore*, everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock.

²⁵ The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house; yet it did not fall, because it had its foundation on the rock.

²⁶ But everyone who hears these words of mine and does *not* put them into practice is like a foolish man who built his house on sand.

²⁷ The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell with a great crash." (Mat 7:22-27 ^{NIV})

Somehow, the WORK that these men did, even though it was good work, and it was spiritual work, and on its own it may have been well-done and praise-worthy, *it was not built on Christ*. It was built on **another** foundation. Paul says that there is only ONE foundation that can be laid that has lasting value and merit – and that foundation is Christ. HE must get the glory. HE must be the cause and the motivation for the work. HE must own the building that is erected on it. These men began with, “Did WE not prophesy.” Even though they did it in the *name* of Christ, using him as their authority, it was done for personal gain. “Did WE not drive out demons and perform miracles?” *Same thing*.

This was Moses’ sin at the rock in the desert: “Must WE bring water out of this rock?” (Num 20.1-12); then he struck the rock *twice*, as if to force the water out. He and Aaron stole God’s glory. It was GOD who made provision for His people through the Rock, not Moses. And CHRIST is the rock from whom living water flows today by God’s grace. Therefore Christ is the foundation, the **base** on which everything we do rests and derives its value. And he is the *basis*, the motivation, for all we do in this life. That’s why *we do everything as for Christ*. (Col 3.23)

Part 1 – Laying the Foundation of Christ

Let’s look at our Foundation, which is the PERSON of Jesus Christ, *not* our faith in Christ. Faith, by its very nature, is a dependent faith; it is faith IN *someone* or *something*. It is not self-contained; it is not a basis in itself, nor a truth on which other things rest. Rather *faith* rests on the truth, on something outside itself. Our salvation is *received* through faith, *but our salvation is not built on faith*; it is not *caused* by faith; it does not *depend* on faith. Our salvation is *built* on Christ; it is *caused* by Christ; it *depends* on Christ – and it *rests* on **Christ ALONE**.

Paul is pleading with the Corinthians to place their faith in God's unlimited **power** (1Cor 2.5). That's the same power which God displayed in arranging to send Jesus to the cross to redeem his people; the power which God displayed through Jesus' resurrection from the dead. Our faith must *rest in* and *on* Jesus Christ, as the foundation of all things; he must be the only One to whom we look for strength and hope and salvation, regardless what this life may bring our way.

You know that we walk by faith, not by sight (2Cor 5.7), but our faith is **grounded** in Christ, in what we know about the cross and about God's Plan of Salvation. Our faith rests in the great **promises** of God, just as Abraham rested in the promises of God – no matter how long he had to wait. He knew God is faithful, trustworthy, and able. But it took time for Abraham's faith to mature, and the promise to be fulfilled. ***Saving faith is an event*** based on knowledge and belief. But saving faith must ***become*** active faith, living faith, trusting faith; ***and that's a process***. The same knowledge and belief that saves us, is what sanctifies us. We find different ways to apply our faith in our mundane day-to-day living, and also in adversity. ***Both*** cause faith to mature like a fine wine. It takes time and testing to mature it.

How has Paul been laying a foundation in Christ?

Verse 11 - For no one can lay any foundation other than what is **BEING** laid, which is Jesus Christ.^{NET}

Isn't that an interesting way to put it? It's not that the foundation was laid two thousand years ago. Rather each Christian must lay a foundation which is Christ. I've taken the text from the NET, the *New English Translation*; it's the only one that keeps the right verb tense from the Greek. The foundation is ***being*** laid. It's an ongoing action that takes place in the present, not in the past – not on the cross; not at the resurrection, not at Christ's Ascension. ***Even though ALL of these must be present in the foundation we lay***, each local church body, each Christian, must lay the foundation of Christ, just as Paul laid it at Corinth. The work of the cross, the necessity of the Resurrection, the power of the Ascension, are the **BASIS**, the **UNDERPINNING**, the **GROUND** on which our entire Christian life rests and on which we must build our life in Christ.

Paul has been acting as a wise master-builder – like a *General Contractor*. He thought through how best to go about laying the foundation, *proceeding in stages*. He and others have been working in concert to lay the foundation of Christ, so they too would choose to know nothing but Christ, and him crucified (1Cor 2.2). Until that foundation is laid, whatever is built on it will crumble. Paul has been pouring

into these Corinthians, like pouring concrete, the sure knowledge of salvation by grace through faith in Jesus Christ alone.

The Corinthians, however, are like little children who think they know how to operate the kitchen appliances themselves; they are venturing out on their own. They have begun to build a Christian life based on their worldly understanding. They are becoming like the workers of evil that Christ denied knowing. Their faith is not *resting* on Christ. What they do is not *for* Christ or *because* of Christ. They are not governed by a spiritual mind; ***they have missed the link between what they do and who they are.*** They must learn to build ON the foundation, and not beside it. They are now ready for the next stage of their Christian walk. They must learn that whatever is not built ON the foundation, whatever is not ON the Rock, will be swept away in times of testing. ***Behind me*** you'll see some pictures of what happens when the foundation is faulty and the storms of life come. ***It won't matter how strong the building is, if it is built on a weak or a faulty foundation.***

S (roughly 5 seconds each)

Why are these well-instructed Corinthians *not* Christ-centered and cross-driven? What's the difference between knowing ABOUT Christ, and **knowing Christ**? Well, to lay the foundation of Christ, you *must* become more and more familiar, as I said earlier, with the PERSON of Jesus Christ – with his perspective on life; with the trustworthiness of our Redeemer; the sureness of His Way; the exclusiveness of His Truth; the power of His Life; the brightness of His Light; the love of God who sent him; and the Wisdom that men cannot obtain apart from him.

Infants in Christ do not yet know Christ. They are just beginning to explore this new kingdom into which they were born by God's decree. They fumble around, experimenting, testing, touching, stumbling, knocking things over, stepping into things that are not only messy, but dangerous. They need **help** to grow; they need guidance, oversight, and instruction. That's the path that every new believer must tread from infancy to maturity. ***We don't blame children for being children.*** But we don't leave children as children either. Why not?

Spiritual infants cannot effectively build the kingdom.

They lack the *wisdom* and *maturity* of a spiritual mind;
They lack the healthy long-term *habits* that a spiritual mind will build into them;
They lack the *strength* that comes from God when they practice righteousness;
They lack the *experience* and *confidence* that comes from being tested repeatedly;
They must be *forced* over time to depend on God's Spirit, *to be made ready* by the trials the Spirit leads them into, just as he led Christ himself into the desert to be tested, so that he was prepared for what lay ahead! (Mat 4.1)

Infants in Christ, spiritual babes, *hate* to be tested, *hate* self-discipline, *hate* not having things their own way, *hate* struggle. They want an un-eventful and fully gratifying life – never having to say “no”, unless it’s “no” to responsibility.

Mature believers embrace testing, because they know it’s the only way to reach the end of themselves; they know testing is how they will learn to be Spirit-led. They have been taught by trial to love only God, and not *anything* in this world.

Infants endure with constant crying. *Mature believers overcome* with resolve.

The more we know about Christ, about who he is, about what he has done, about what he is doing now at the right hand of God, the greater our confidence in him will be; and thus the firmer the foundation on which our faith rests. *And when that foundation is firm, the things we build on it will stand* when the floods come, and the winds blow, as you saw in the pictures. Peter wrote,

^{NAU} **2 Peter 1:2-3** Grace and peace be multiplied to you *in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord*; seeing that His divine power has granted to us everything pertaining to life and godliness, *through the true knowledge of Him who called us* by His own glory and excellence.

Paul writes in ^{CSB} **2 Corinthians 9:8** And God is able to make every grace overflow to you, **so that** in every way, **always having everything you need, you may excel in every good work**. There’s *the work* again, the *building*.

Part 2 – Building on the Foundation of Christ

Let’s look at what it means to BUILD on the foundation of Christ. Please look again at verse 12.

Verse 12: If anyone builds on the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, or straw, ¹³ **each** builder's work will be plainly seen, for the Day will make it clear, because it will be revealed by fire. And the fire will test what kind of work **each** has done. ¹⁴ If what someone has built survives, he will receive a reward. ¹⁵ If someone's work is burned up, he will suffer loss. He himself will be saved, but only as through fire.

It seems that some things which we do in this life will leave an eternal legacy; and we will receive an eternal reward for them. Other things will be consumed in the flames, even though we ourselves will not be consumed.

As you heard last time, *there are trials coming in your life. You may be in the middle of one right now.* The work of your hands **will be** tested in the fires. That's not optional. Everything you do, and don't do, will be tested for strength, endurance, and for the most important quality of all: **genuineness**. Not only must you build your life on the firm foundation of Christ, but the things which you build with on that foundation must be made of lasting materials – *they must be made of the stuff that can withstand fiery trials.*

We often talk about serving God with our hands, minds, talents, care, and love – these are the **ways** in which we build, but they are not the **materials** with which we build. And that begs the question, what does Paul mean by his description of **gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, or straw**? We know these are metaphors for other things, but all we can tell from them are the **qualities** that mark each one, and that the fires of testing will consume some materials and not others. Metaphors are nice, but we have to understand them in order to figure out whether the work we're doing will last or not. Paul has given us descriptions of **two types** of material:

First, gold, silver, and precious stones – these are **valuable** things that last, and are purified in the fires of testing – their dross is burned off in the flames so they become even more valuable.

Second, wood, hay, and straw – these are **common** things that are both temporary and consumable; they may be **lost** either by use, or by being burned in the flames.

That's still a little vague. What does Scripture say about these kinds of materials? Let's begin with the valuable materials.

- **Gold:** The Ark of the Covenant was covered with gold inside and out (Exo 25.11); the lamp-stand in the tabernacle was solid gold (Exo 25.31); many of the furnishings in the tabernacle were made with gold. Solomon's temple, especially the sanctuary, was covered with gold (1Kgs 6.20). ^{ESV} **Psalm 119:72** says, "The law of your mouth is better to me than thousands of gold and silver pieces." ^{ESV} **Psalm 119:127** says, "Therefore I love your commandments above gold, above fine gold." ^{ESV} **Proverbs 16:16** How much better to get wisdom than gold! To get understanding is to be chosen rather than silver.
- **Silver:** Like gold, silver is found throughout the tabernacle and its furnishings. ^{NAS} **Proverbs 25:4** Take away the dross from the silver, And there comes out a vessel for the smith; ^{ESV} **Malachi 3:3** [The Lord] will sit as a refiner and purifier of silver, and he will purify the sons of Levi and refine them like gold and silver, and they will bring offerings in righteousness to the LORD.

- **Precious stones:** The priestly ephod and breastplate was adorned with precious stones, one for each tribe of Israel with its name inscribed on the stone (Exo 28.11-12). David's crown had a precious stone (2Sam 12.30) Sheba and Hiram honored Solomon by giving him gifts of precious stones. (1Kgs 10.2, 11); The foundations of the walls of the New Jerusalem are made of precious stones (Rev 21.19)

It seems from these descriptions that valuable things, things that last, are things concerning the Gospel of Jesus Christ, the foreshadowing of which is found in the Ark of the Covenant, in Christ's fulfillment of the Law, his as our Great High Priest. He is our Intercessor and Mediator before the throne of God. He is the veil through whom we confidently enter into the Holy of Holies to have communion with our Creator. When these things are foremost in our minds as we serve God, as we worship and pray, they are eternally valuable, and they yield eternal rewards. ***We will continue to pray and to worship in heaven.*** Fellowship with God, and knowledge of God, are lasting; they ***grow*** in value as we are tested. They are not consumed – they mature with time, like fine wine. ***And so we prepare for our eternal life in this life, practicing here what we will be doing there for eternity.***

What about temporary things, consumables? The first question I had, being a city boy, was this: "What's the difference between hay and straw?" I found out that,

- **Hay** refers to nutritional grasses and legumes, like alfalfa or clover, that farmers cut, dry, and use as feed for farm animals.
- **Straw** comes from the hollow stalks of grain (like wheat), used mostly as bedding and garden mulch, but it can also be used as feed too. Straw has less nutritional value than hay, and I'm told cows don't think it tastes very good.

With these descriptions in mind, what does it mean to build on the foundation of Christ with wood, hay, and straw? Things that are consumed and temporary are things done out of pride, and for purposes of self-glory; they are things done to feed the flesh like feed for animals being fattened for the slaughter (that's hay); they are things that offer sparse nourishment, and prickly padding to rest on (that's straw); they are things that offer only temporary comfort (like burning a log that is soon consumed, leaving us cold again). I'll let ***you*** figure out which things in your life are consumables, temporary, and offer only short-term gains for you.

John Gill, an 18th century commentator, thinks these consumables are the things that Paul condemns in other passages, such as fables, endless genealogies, human traditions, Jewish rites and ceremonies; worldly wisdom, Gentile philosophy, vain

speculations, vain and idle notions – *in short*, anything that doesn't honor the grace of God, or isn't becoming to the person, blood, and righteousness of Christ, or is inconsistent with the Spirit's work of grace.

That's pretty broad, but it means that whatever we think, say, or do *without considering the Gospel*, without standing on the truth of Christ, will be swept away or burned up – such things are temporary, and they *will* be consumed.

As we get better at building with spiritual materials, we will begin to mature, and we will become wise. We will begin to produce the fruits of the Spirit who has been at work in us all along – first unseen when we were infants, and then seen by **all** as we mature. The world **will see our good deeds and praise our heavenly Father**. (Mat 5.16) *It's good to know that if we do the work right, we'll grow.*

What Christ has done *for* us on the cross, and is doing *through* us by the Spirit, are things that have eternal value. They keep us humble because we can see that it's all the work of the Father, and it's all done by the Son for the Father's glory (John 17.1). *Through our worship in word and song, through communion, through the way that we fellowship with God and other believers, we have the opportunity to acknowledge our submission to Christ as our Lord and Master.* We're looking to the cross of Christ; and *because* of it, we're surrendering to God our Father, by the power of His Spirit. Therefore,

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all. Amen. (2Co 13:14^{ESV})

COMMUNION.