

“Quality Construction”

1 Corinthians 3:1-17

First Presbyterian Church, Corpus Christi, TX

Rev. Charles S. Blackshear • February 18, 2018

In just a few minutes we're going to go over to Kleberg Hall for lunch and our Annual Meeting. The reason we have this meeting is to look back on where we've been over the past year and where we're going this year. As we look back at 2017 we would have to admit that Hurricane Harvey was a significant event, one of those things that will shape the future of our region for a long time. One of the things that becomes very apparent when we have a storm like that is that it matters how you build things. The way your house is constructed matters. A lot. The materials that are used, the way they are put together, and the quality of construction all affect how sturdy the building will be and whether it will withstand the storms.

The same thing applies to your life. In our Scripture this morning, the Apostle Paul says that the way you live your life is like building a building and the day is coming when the quality of our work will be tested. What he's saying, which is really what God is saying to us, is that the quality of your construction, the materials you use, and the way you put them together matters to God. Last week we talked about some of the building material of our lives, things like faith and virtue, knowledge and self-control, patience and godliness and brotherly affection, and of course sacrificial love.

If you've ever built a house, you know all the details that go into it. There are so many decisions to be made. You have to decide where the rooms will go and how many bathrooms. You have to choose from a nearly endless selection of flooring and doors and faucets and doorknobs. Now while those are all important decisions, one of the most important aspects of building a house is the foundation. You probably don't think much about the foundation of your house unless there's a problem. But without a proper foundation the house will have serious problems. The foundation must be level, it must be strong

enough to bear the weight of the building, and most of all it has to be exactly the same size as the building itself.

When you think of your life, what are you building? What is the foundation that you are building on? Is it strong enough? And does it match what you are building? Here's what you should be building. In verse 16 Paul says, "Do you not know that you are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in you? If anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy him. For God's temple is holy, and *you* are that temple." What you are building is a temple for God. That's why, as we heard in Leviticus, we are to live holy lives, because God is holy.

In the Bible, the temple is the place that symbolized God's presence with His people. It was the place where the people worshiped and sacrificed. It was the place where God's presence was especially felt. From the very beginning of the Bible we find the idea of God having a personal relationship with His people. But also from the very beginning of the Bible we find the people messing up the relationship.

They did the same thing with the temple. God had declared that the temple should be a house of prayer for *all* people. It should have been a place that united people, but it ended up dividing them. We know that there was a point in the temple in Jerusalem where Gentiles were not permitted to go any farther. There were signs warning Gentiles that if they went beyond that wall the penalty was death. This was called the Court of the Gentiles. There was also the court of women, which was as far into the temple as women were permitted. The most restricted area was the "Holy of Holies" where God's presence was said to be. Only priests were permitted inside the Holy of Holies and then only once a year. Rather than a place where people could come into God's presence, the temple became a place where the people could keep God "boxed in."

The people could point to the temple and say, “God’s in there.” It became a way to separate the holy from the profane or common. With God safely in the temple, the people were free to do whatever they wanted the rest of the time. We sometimes fall into the same trap. We think that if we come to church for an hour or so each week and give some money that we’ve done our part. We tell ourselves that God is safely inside the church building and that we come into His presence when we’re ready. But that’s not what the Bible tells us here. We, the church made up of all of its people, is the temple of God. The “you” in verse 16 is plural. It really should read, “y’all are God’s temple” and “God’s Spirit dwells in y’all.” Jesus said that when two or more are gathered in His name that He is present. This is what He meant.

When we come together to be the church, we are the temple of God. When we are faithfully serving as the Christ’s hands and feet on earth we actually experience God’s presence. That’s why it’s so important for each one of us to be involved in missions and ministries.

So lets go back to our question about the foundation. If we are building a temple of the Holy Spirit with our life, does it match the foundation? What does the foundation look like? Beginning in verse 10 Paul says, “According to the grace of God given to me, like a skilled master builder I laid a foundation.” Then he says, “For no one can lay a foundation other than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. The only foundation that will support the weight of your life is Jesus Christ. Anything else will crumble and fail. The Corinthians, however, are trying to build their lives on worldly or human wisdom instead of on the Gospel. This is what Paul means when he calls them “people of the flesh” and “infants in Christ.” Sadly we often do the same thing. Statistics today show that there is not a significant difference between Christians and non-Christians in our society in the areas of divorce, alcohol and drug abuse, and sex outside of marriage.

Finally, Paul says, “Let each one take care how he builds upon” the foundation. “If anyone builds on the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw—each one’s work will become manifest, for the Day (that’s judgment day) will disclose it, because it will be revealed by fire, and the fire will test what sort of work each one has done.” Many people, I’m afraid, get sidetracked by Paul’s use of fire here. I don’t think that Paul is referring to the fire of judgment, meaning Hell, nor does he intend for us to think about the purifying properties of fire, such as refining gold or silver.

Instead, I think what verses 14 and 15 are trying to tell us is that one day our time here on earth will come to an end. On that day it won’t matter what our intentions were. The only question will be, “has my life been worthwhile?” In other words, “did the work that I built survive? Did I live my life in a way that was pleasing to God?”

At the end of the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus tells the crowd, “Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. On that day many will say to me, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?’ And then will I declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness.’ Everyone then who hears these words of mine and does them will be like a wise man who built his house on the rock. And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house, but it did not fall, because it had been founded on the rock. And everyone who hears these words of mine and does not do them will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand. And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell, and great was the fall of it.”

So think about what you’re building. Are you trying to lay your own foundation, relying on your education or experience or qualifications? Do you make decisions based on

what you think or how you feel? Or are you building on the only foundation that lasts, Jesus and His Word? Are you building with things that can't last, like straw and sticks and money? Or are you building with those things that last

forever, like patience and virtue, self-control and godliness, brotherly affection and love? Think about that.

Amen.