

Paul was writing to the Corinthians to squelch the growing division he heard was taking place. The Corinthians were forming factions around their favorite teacher. In the previous passage he had declared that their quarreling and jealousy were signs that they were spiritually immature. They needed to grow up and see that all their teachers are on the same team, striving to build them up in the faith so that they can become mature. The sign of maturity is unity. In our passage for today we will see Paul is emphasizing that all their teachers are working together as servants of God to help them mature. But there were also detractors who were being destructive, which is a serious issue.

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. 1 Corinthians 3:10 Some people suggest we do nothing to build the temple in which God will dwell, the saints of New Jerusalem (Revelation 21:2ⁱ). They say it is all God's work. In one sense they are right. Everything is from God. But in another sense, Paul just called the apostles and elders fellow laborers with God (verse 9ⁱⁱ). God gave him the grace to lay the gospel foundation for the church of Corinth: Jesus crucified for our sins. God has many laborers who are anointed like the craftsmen who worked on the tabernacle (Exodus 31:2-6ⁱⁱⁱ). It is all under God's direction, empowerment, and inspiration, but He has graciously chosen to work through His children, evangelizing, discipling, preaching, and teaching. Elders are both the living stones and the fellow laborers. James 3:1^{iv} warns elders that we will be strictly accountable for what we teach. Incorrect understanding of God's Word can cause the building to become unstable. The ones who teach false doctrines or their own opinions will be held accountable (Galatians 1:8^v).

When Jesus taught, He would sometimes say, “You have heard that it has been said...” Matthew 5:21. He was correcting some of the oral traditions that did not line up with the Word of God, or misinterpretations of the Word. What Paul is warning against is teachers saying, “The Bible says, but I say unto you...” They are adding to Scripture and bringing a curse on themselves. One of Apostle Paul’s last warnings was this: *For the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions,* 2 Timothy 4:3 It is easy to do these days with YouTube. Instead of conforming to the Word of God, we can find a teachers who teach our preferences. That is building on the foundation of Jesus with material that will not stand on the Day when the church is judged (2 Corinthians 5:10^{vi}). In many cases it is not even on the foundation of Jesus, the cornerstone.

In Paul’s day the construction of a synagogue took decades. Someone would lay the foundation and retire. Others would come after adding walls or columns, and still others would construct the roof. Everyone who took part in the construction was working for the completed project. None were more important than the others. The builders all had a common goal in sight.

In this verse Paul refers to himself as skilled master builder. A direct translation would be wise architect. In fact, the Greek word used here is the source of our word architect. Translators didn’t use it here because God is obviously the architect. The way the word was used in Paul’s day was a person who gave useful directions to follow the

plan, like a construction foreman. In other words, Paul oversaw how all the various components came together and the final product.

This reminds us of Jesus' parable on houses built either on the rock or on sand (Matthew 7:24-27^{vii}). God was referred to as the Rock of Israel (Genesis 49:24^{viii}). In the parable the house built on the sand collapsed when the storm came. The house on the rock stood firm. So, when Paul calls the foundation the teaching of the Apostles and prophets with Jesus as the Cornerstone of the church (Ephesians 2:20^{ix}), He is declaring the Word to be one with God (John 1:14^x). That is because all the prophets pointed to Christ and the Apostles taught us His words (Luke 24:44)^{xi}. Any other foundation than Jesus and what He has done for us is not really a foundation. It is just shifting sand. It won't withstand the storms of life. Only a life built upon the Word, Christ Jesus, will endure. Having that one foundation brings us into unity. Is your life built upon Jesus and His Word?

Paul tells us it was grace that made him a master builder. Jesus not only confronted Paul, at that time called Saul, on the road to Damascus, but He had prepared Paul all his life as he studied the Scriptures. Then after the encounter with Jesus, Paul spent three years in the wilderness as God showed him the truth of the Scriptures (Galatians 1:17,18^{xii}). God revealed to him the mystery hidden for ages, that the Messiah would come and live a sinless life, bear our sins to death on a cross, and conquer death (Romans 16:25,26^{xiii}). In the process He gave us His righteousness (2 Corinthians 5:21^{xiv}).

Paul laid that foundational truth for those in the church of Corinth. Then other ministers came and built further upon it. But Paul gives a warning. Let each one take care how he builds upon it. We are responsible to God for what we teach. He is the Word. **If we distort the message, we are distorting the image of God in the listeners' minds.** However, the application of everyone being careful how he builds can apply more broadly than just teachers. We all influence the building of the church (Ephesians 4:11,12^{xv}). The warning is for all of us to direct our attention to how we are building. Are we pointing others to the Scriptures and a personal relationship with Jesus or to ourselves?

¹¹ For no one can lay a foundation other than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. 1 Corinthians 3:11 The main thing is Jesus and the grace that comes to us because of His sacrifice. Those who teach works or the law as somehow making us pleasing to God, or any other false doctrine, will find the next two verses applicable to them (2 Corinthians 11:4^{xvi}). It won't help the vineyard or the building and does not result in anything of substance that remains. There is no reward for all their labor. It is like a homeowner who tries to add to his house only to find he needs to hire a professional to tear out what he did so it can be done correctly.

This foundation is sure—it provides stability. All other foundations are non-foundations in comparison to Christ. In this way, if Christianity is true, it provides the foundation for two of the greatest longings of the human heart: First, the human heart longs for unity and reconciled relationships. No one wakes up thinking, “How can I create discord today?”—“How can I disrespect others and have them turn on me?” We long for shalomic, reconciled, harmonious, holistic relationships. Second, the human heart longs for stability that can withstand life's storms. No one wakes up thinking, “I hope life throws me a curveball that I can't handle today!”—“It would be great to

experience a trial that will shake me to the core.” We long for steady, normal, pleasant, secure lives. We long for identity; so we spend our lives constructing our own.^{xvii} But the only place we can find it is on the one unshakable foundation. That is not the organized church we see, but the true believers whose identities are based on that foundation.

Isaiah prophesied about this foundation in 28:16: *therefore thus says the Lord God, “Behold, I am the one who has laid as a foundation in Zion, a stone, a tested stone, a precious cornerstone, of a sure foundation: ‘Whoever believes will not be in haste.* The Lord laid the foundation stone of His beloved Son in Jerusalem. Paul laid it in Corinth by proclaiming the gospel there.

Did you notice in that Isaiah passage that the Lord did not say the one who stands on it, but rather the one who believes will not be in haste? Salvation is by faith (Ephesians 2:8^{xviii}). And those who believe by faith that we have a sure foundation that cannot be shaken are not running around trying to find a way to God (Hebrews 12:27^{xix}). They are at peace with God, which means they won’t be in haste. The Hebrew word for haste is to be agitated, disturbed, or in a panic (see LEB). We find our rest in Jesus. When Peter quoted the verse, he changed it from haste to “confounded.” Whoever believes will not be put to shame (1 Peter 2:6^{xx}). We enter Jesus as our Sabbath rest, ceasing from our own works and letting Him do the work in us (Hebrews 4:10^{xxi}). Our shame is removed because He took it upon Himself on the cross.

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. 1 Corinthians 3:12,13 The precious stones and metals are the truths of Scripture and disciples brought into the kingdom. The combustibles are fluff: methods, feel good sermons, prosperity doctrine, secret wisdom, and the likes. The Word will stand firm when the heavens melt away (2 Peter 3:12^{xxii}). If you want something that lasts, you better seek to know the Word and make disciples, because everything else will burn. God will separate that which is substantial from that which is temporal and meaningless. Or as the author of Hebrews expressed it, everything that can be shaken will be shaken so that which cannot be shaken will remain (Hebrews 12:27^{xxiii}).

Truth is eternal. The actions in response to the prompting of the Spirit bring lasting results. Our growing relationship with Jesus is eternal. This life is so short compared to eternity. If only our minds and hearts could grasp the brevity of this life and how our choices affect our eternal state, we would certainly be striving to invest in heaven. Jesus commanded us to lay up our treasures in heaven (Matthew 6:20^{xxiv}). He meant to lay up that which will endure through the fire of testing.

So, we examine our work to see if it is merely busy doing things that bring the respect of man, promoting ourselves, or are we acting at God’s leading in obedience to the Word and the Spirit? In chapter four verse five of this letter, Paul tells us that in that day God will disclose the purposes of the heart (1 Corinthians 4:5^{xxv}). We can fake it now and impress people, but on that day, the day when Christ returns to judge the earth, all will be disclosed (2 Corinthians 5:10^{xxvi}). Peter prayed that the coming disclosure would result in praise, glory, and honor of God (1 Peter 1:7^{xxvii}). Is that what the disclosure of your heart will reveal?

¹⁴ If the work that anyone has built on the foundation survives, he will receive a reward. 1 Corinthians 3:14 What remains is the truth of the Word, fruit from the

vineyard, the building completed, a dwelling for God, a bride for Christ. All else is just tinder. God is a consuming fire. Only the eternal things will remain. Diamonds are not really forever, but faith in Christ, the fruits of the Spirit, the transformation to godliness in lives, the Word of God in our hearts, and the fruit of righteousness is forever. If your life results in those eternal things you will receive a reward (Luke 19:16-19^{xxviii}; Revelation 22:12^{xxix}). Heavenly rewards are mentioned twenty-nine times in the New Testament. What they are we have only a hint of in the crowns mentioned in Scripture. There are crowns of incorruption (1 Corinthians 9:25^{xxx}), crowns of righteousness (2 Timothy 4:8^{xxxi}), crowns of life (James 1:12^{xxxii}), and crowns of glory (1 Peter 5:4^{xxxiii}). These crowns are surely figurative of something other than a gold band on our heads but must represent some type of position or authority. We can only guess at what rewards are in that heavenly realm, but we can know they are more than worth any effort here in our short lives.

¹⁵ If anyone's work is burned up, he will suffer loss, though he himself will be saved, but only as through fire. 1 Corinthians 3:15 Living for the perishable will mean that you lose all you labored for. You may be saved but there will be nothing to show for your life, no rewards to lay at Jesus' feet. You wouldn't work for an employer for a year without a paycheck. Yet, some believers spend their whole lives working for nothing. It is still better than weeping and gnashing teeth (Matthew 13:42^{xxxiv}), but what regret people must have to know they wasted their lives on what would not endure. The family and friends you could have discipled, the Scripture you could have hidden in your heart, the lives you could have touched and pointed to Jesus must haunt those who lose it all to the fire, that is until God wipes the tears from our eyes (Revelation 7:17^{xxxv}).

The fifteenth chapter of this letter seems to indicate that there are different levels of glory in heaven, as it compares the resurrected to stars and how they differ in brightness (1 Corinthians 15:41^{xxxvi}). How we live today affects our eternal state in heaven. I never hear any teaching on this. Perhaps that is because as teachers we don't want people to be laboring for an exalted position in heaven. That is the wrong motivation. We serve out of love for Jesus and all He has done for us. Nevertheless, heavenly reward is clear theme in the New Testament.

¹⁶ Do you not know that you are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in you?
¹⁷ If anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy him. For God's temple is holy, and you are that temple. 1 Corinthians 3:16,17 Paul now explains why careful attention to how we build is such a serious matter. "Do you not know" is a mild rebuke used ten times in this letter. Some of the Corinthians saw their value in the gift of wisdom, but they were not acting out of wisdom. In other words, Paul was saying, "You should know this, but you are acting like you don't." The building is the temple of God indwelt by the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 6:19^{xxxvii}). There are two Greek words for temple. The first (*heiron*) refers to all the temple precincts. The second (*naos*) refers to the sanctuary, the shrine proper. It is *naos*, the *sanctuary*, the shrine proper, used here.^{xxxviii} Temple is singular but you is plural. He is speaking of the church of Corinth, the gathering of believers in that city. If anyone destroys the church of Corinth through false teaching, or division, or by whatever means, God will destroy him. What a warning! Paul is referring to those who are not just sincerely wrong, but those who hinder the growth of the church by sowing poisonous teaching, corrupting the minds of believers, and turning people from unity to division. Paul is warning them of the wolves that come in to devour the

flock, to use them for their own advancement and personal gain. Paul referred to these people as fierce wolves (Acts 20:29^{xxxix}; Matthew 7:15^{xl}).

I have seen people destroy the temple. Pastor/teachers become popular, and pride begins to grow. They justify giving in to greed or lust. When they are found out, and they almost always are (Numbers 32:23^{xli}), the temple collapses because the eyes of the congregation were on the man instead of on Jesus. The use of “anyone” in verse 17 means it can be someone other than those in leadership. Sometimes it is a prominent prideful member who wants his or her way and gets people to side with him or her. The faction grows until the church finally splits. They usually draw away as many as they can, believing that they are saving them but are in actuality justifying having their prideful way.

God will destroy him is quite a warning. Sadly, I have witnessed that too. When lust is involved, it usually results in divorce, and like the situation with King David, the children are devastated. When it is out of pride the new faction carries on for a while and then falls apart. The result is that the followers no longer desire fellowship.

This is one reason equal and accountable elders are God’s clear plan for leadership in a church (Titus 1:5^{xlii}). They hold one another accountable and can discipline one another and carry on if one falls away.

The more sinister way of destroying the temple is when someone begins teaching false doctrine secretly so that the elders are unaware. Fortunately, that is usually found out before the temple is destroyed, but it still does a lot of damage. This church has been damaged in that way several times in the past. It almost succeeded in destroying the church shortly before I was called here.

We should not be ignorant of the enemy’s tactics (2 Corinthians 2:11^{xliii}). A church divided will not stand. God placed this church here in the middle of the tourist center to touch lives. How sad it would be if it turned into a retail outlet. Satan would love nothing better. That is why we must stand on the Word, hold to the truth, follow the elders’ leading (Hebrews 13:17^{xliv}), and reject gossip. If you are troubled by something, bring it to the elders. We must avoid factionalism. The cross must be central (1 Corinthians 1:23^{xlv}). We are saved by grace through Jesus’ sacrifice of Himself. That puts us all in the same boat, sinners saved by grace.

I’ll close this message with the admonition from the Apostle at the beginning of this letter. *¹⁰ I appeal to you, brothers, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree, and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be united in the same mind and the same judgment.* 1 Corinthians 1:10 Let us all respond with a whole-hearted AMEN!

Questions:

- 1 How is God’s temple being built today?
- 2 What is the only foundation of the church?
- 3 When Paul brings up foundation, what passage is he referring to?
- 4 What will remain after being tested by fire? 5 Who receives a reward?
- 6 What do you hope the disclosure of your heart reveals?
- 7 What won’t remain? 8 Are we all the same in heaven?
- 9 What is the temple in verse 16 and what can destroy it?
- 10 What is the warning to anyone who would destroy it? Why?

ⁱ **Revelation 21:2 (ESV)**

² And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband.

ⁱⁱ **1 Corinthians 3:9 (ESV)** ⁹ For we are God’s fellow workers. You are God’s field, God’s building.

ⁱⁱⁱ **Exodus 31:2-6 (ESV)** ² “See, I have called by name Bezalel the son of Uri, son of Hur, of the tribe of Judah, ³ and I have filled him with the Spirit of God, with ability and intelligence, with knowledge and all craftsmanship, ⁴ to devise artistic designs, to work in gold, silver, and bronze, ⁵ in cutting stones for setting, and in carving wood, to work in every craft. ⁶ And behold, I have appointed with him Oholiab, the son of Ahisamach, of the tribe of Dan. And I have given to all able men ability, that they may make all that I have commanded you:

^{iv} **James 3:1 (ESV)** ¹ Not many of you should become teachers, my brothers, for you know that we who teach will be judged with greater strictness.

^v **Galatians 1:8 (ESV)** ⁸ But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach to you a gospel contrary to the one we preached to you, let him be accursed.

^{vi} **2 Corinthians 5:10 (ESV)** ¹⁰ For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive what is due for what he has done in the body, whether good or evil.

^{vii} **Matthew 7:24-27 (ESV)** ²⁴ “Everyone then who hears these words of mine and does them will be like a wise man who built his house on the rock. ²⁵ 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. ²⁶ 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. ²⁷ 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.”

^{viii} **Genesis 49:24 (ESV)** ²⁴ yet his bow remained unmoved; his arms were made agile by the hands of the Mighty One of Jacob (from there is the Shepherd, the Stone of Israel),

^{ix} **Ephesians 2:20 (ESV)** ²⁰ built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone,

^x **John 1:14 (ESV)** ¹⁴ And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.

^{xi} **Luke 24:44 (ESV)** ⁴⁴ Then he said to them, “These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you, that everything written about me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled.”

^{xii} **Galatians 1:17-18 (ESV)** ¹⁷ nor did I go up to Jerusalem to those who were apostles before me, but I went away into Arabia, and returned again to Damascus. ¹⁸ Then after three years I went up to Jerusalem to visit Cephas and remained with him fifteen days.

^{xiii} **Romans 16:25-26 (ESV)** ²⁵ Now to him who is able to strengthen you according to my gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery that was kept secret for long ages ²⁶ but has now been disclosed and through the prophetic writings has been made known to all nations, according to the command of the eternal God, to bring about the obedience of faith—

^{xiv} **2 Corinthians 5:21 (ESV)** ²¹ For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

^{xv} **Ephesians 4:11-12 (ESV)** ¹¹ And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, ¹² to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ,

^{xvi} **2 Corinthians 11:4 (ESV)** ⁴ For if someone comes and proclaims another Jesus than the one we proclaimed, or if you receive a different spirit from the one you received, or if you accept a different gospel from the one you accepted, you put up with it readily enough.

^{xvii} Um, S. T. (2015). [*1 Corinthians: The Word of the Cross*](#) (R. K. Hughes, Ed.; p. 61). Crossway.

^{xviii} **Ephesians 2:8 (ESV)** ⁸ For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God,

^{xix} **Hebrews 12:27 (ESV)** ²⁷ This phrase, “Yet once more,” indicates the removal of things that are shaken—that is, things that have been made—in order that the things that cannot be shaken may remain.

^{xx} **1 Peter 2:6 (ESV)** ⁶ For it stands in Scripture: “Behold, I am laying in Zion a stone, a cornerstone chosen and precious, and whoever believes in him will not be put to shame.”

^{xxi} **Hebrews 4:10 (ESV)** ¹⁰ for whoever has entered God’s rest has also rested from his works as God did from his.

^{xxii} **2 Peter 3:12 (ESV)** ¹² waiting for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be set on fire and dissolved, and the heavenly bodies will melt as they burn!

^{xxiii} **Hebrews 12:27 (ESV)** ²⁷ This phrase, “Yet once more,” indicates the removal of things that are shaken—that is, things that have been made—in order that the things that cannot be shaken may remain.

^{xxiv} **Matthew 6:20 (ESV)** ²⁰ but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal.

^{xxv} **1 Corinthians 4:5 (ESV)** ⁵ Therefore do not pronounce judgment before the time, before the Lord comes, who will bring to light the things now hidden in darkness and will disclose the purposes of the heart. Then each one will receive his commendation from God.

^{xxvi} **2 Corinthians 5:10 (ESV)** ¹⁰ For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive what is due for what he has done in the body, whether good or evil.

^{xxvii} **1 Peter 1:7 (ESV)** ⁷ so that the tested genuineness of your faith—more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire—may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ.

^{xxviii} **Luke 19:16-19 (ESV)** ¹⁶ The first came before him, saying, ‘Lord, your mina has made ten minas more.’ ¹⁷ And he said to him, ‘Well done, good servant! Because you have been faithful in a very little, you shall have authority over ten cities.’ ¹⁸ And the second came, saying, ‘Lord, your mina has made five minas.’ ¹⁹ And he said to him, ‘And you are to be over five cities.’

^{xxix} **Revelation 22:12 (ESV)** ¹² “Behold, I am coming soon, bringing my recompense with me, to repay each one for what he has done.

^{xxx} **1 Corinthians 9:25 (ESV)** ²⁵ Every athlete exercises self-control in all things. They do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable.

^{xxxi} **2 Timothy 4:8 (ESV)** ⁸ Henceforth there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will award to me on that Day, and not only to me but also to all who have loved his appearing.

^{xxxii} **James 1:12 (ESV)** ¹² Blessed is the man who remains steadfast under trial, for when he has stood the test he will receive the crown of life, which God has promised to those who love him.

^{xxxiii} **James 1:12 (ESV)** ¹² Blessed is the man who remains steadfast under trial, for when he has stood the test he will receive the crown of life, which God has promised to those who love him.

^{xxxiv} **Matthew 13:42 (ESV)** ⁴² and throw them into the fiery furnace. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

^{xxxv} **Revelation 7:17 (ESV)** ¹⁷ For the Lamb in the midst of the throne will be their shepherd, and he will guide them to springs of living water, and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.”

^{xxxvi} **1 Corinthians 15:41 (ESV)** ⁴¹ There is one glory of the sun, and another glory of the moon, and another glory of the stars; for star differs from star in glory.

^{xxxvii} **1 Corinthians 6:19 (ESV)** ¹⁹ Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God? You are not your own,

^{xxxviii} Leadership Ministries Worldwide. (1996). *The First & Second Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Corinthians* (p. 59). Leadership Ministries Worldwide.

^{xxxix} **Acts 20:29 (ESV)** ²⁹ I know that after my departure fierce wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock;

^{xl} **Matthew 7:15 (ESV)** ¹⁵ “Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep’s clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves.

^{xli} **Numbers 32:23 (ESV)** ²³ But if you will not do so, behold, you have sinned against the LORD, and be sure your sin will find you out.

^{xlii} **Titus 1:5 (ESV)** ⁵ This is why I left you in Crete, so that you might put what remained into order, and appoint elders in every town as I directed you—

^{xliii} **2 Corinthians 2:11 (ESV)** ¹¹ so that we would not be outwitted by Satan; for we are not ignorant of his designs.

^{xliv} **Hebrews 13:17 (ESV)** ¹⁷ Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls, as those who will have to give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with groaning, for that would be of no advantage to you.

^{xlv} **1 Corinthians 1:23 (ESV)** ²³ but we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles,