

BUILDING GOD'S HOUSE – Part One

The Foundation



As we studied last year, God's word is progressive. The word carries stages of accomplishments or fulfillments. They can sometimes be segmented this way: initial fulfillment, an anticipatory, a progressive and then a cumulative or final fulfillment. We looked at different Scriptures that gave us examples of that. The word that I had heard years ago from the Lord was to write teachings for the different stages of building the house of the Lord. When I use the term, 'house of the Lord,' I refer not to a structure of material objects, but to how the Lord builds us internally with intangible and eternal principles which sets the course of life for a group of people. In the Old

Testament there was a literal building where God was pleased to dwell (1 Chronicles 13:6). Under our New Testament covenant the word says our body is a temple for the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 6:19). The Bible tells us in heaven that God Himself is the temple (Revelation 21:22). But while we are here on earth within the framework of the New Testament covenant, how God implements this building process will not always look the same for every person or group. An evangelist or group of evangelists that can sing will build the house of the Lord differently than let's say a group of musicians that evangelize. Baptists may build it differently than Lutherans and Messianic Jews differently than Pentecostals. Nevertheless, in each person or group of believers certain patterns must be laid down in their lives in order for the work to continue. When you first get saved, you must start to learn who God is. His word and your prayer relationship with Him will start to teach you that. While you may belong to a newly formed group of evangelists, or traditional church or even musicians, you still need to have a firm foundation of faith in God and His word laid down in your life. While there is always a debate in Christian circles as to how this should be done, over the next few months we will look at how this was done in Jesus' life and in the lives of the early believers (who had a Jewish foundation laid, just like Jesus) and in the lives of the early Gentile church (who were all practicing pagans before they came to know Christ). In other words, they weren't so much different than those of us coming to know Christ today.

Why do this? While I may have partially answered that question in the last paragraph, let me quote from Alfred Edersheim's "Sketches of Jewish Social Life;" (Hendrickson Publishers, Peabody, MA, 1994; pp 115-116): "If a faithful picture of society in ancient Greece or Rome were to be presented to view, it is not easy to believe that even they who now most oppose the Bible could wish their aims success. For this, at any rate, may be asserted, without fear of gainsaying, that no other religion than that of the Bible has proved competent to control an advanced, or even an advancing, state of civilization. Every other bound has been successively passed and submerged by the rising tide; how deep only the student of history knows. Two things are here undeniable. In the case of heathenism every advance in civilization has marked a progressive lowering of public morality, the earlier stages of national life always showing a far higher tone than the later. On the contrary, the religion of the Bible (under the old as under the new dispensation) has increasingly raised, if not uniformly the public morals, yet always the tone and standard of public morality; it has continued to exhibit a standard never yet attained, and it has proved its power to control public and social life, to influence and to mould it. Strange as it may sound, it is strictly true that, beyond the boundaries of Israel, it would be scarcely even possible to speak with any propriety of family life, or even of the family, as we understand these terms. It is significant, that the Roman historian Tacitus should mark it as something special

among the Jews---which they only shared with the ancient barbarian Germans---that they regarded it as a crime to kill their offspring!” (Let me note for those of you reading this that Edersheim wrote in the 1800s as a Vienna-born Biblical scholar who converted from Judaism to Christianity. He was also a minister and missionary to the Jews of Romania. The Roman historian Tacitus that he quotes was well known to have hated and despised the Jews. The “ancient barbarian Germans” that he speaks of is referring to the land named by the Romans as Germania.) Edersheim continues: “This is not the place to describe the exposure of children, or the various crimes by which ancient Greece and Rome, in the days of their highest culture, sought to rid themselves of what was regarded as superfluous population. Few of those who have learned to admire classical antiquity have a full conception of any one phase in its social life---whether of the position of woman, the relation of the sexes, slavery, the education of children, their relation to their parents, or the state of public morality. Few still have combined all these features into one picture, and that not merely as exhibited by the lower orders, or even among the higher classes, but as fully owned and approved by those whose names have descended in the admiration of ages as the thinkers, the sages, the poets, the historians, and the statesmen of antiquity.... The full picture under bright sunlight would have been scarcely susceptible of exhibition. For such a world there was only one alternative--either the judgment of Sodom, or the

mercy of the Gospel and the healing of the Cross.”

Any quick review of our own societies will tell us that Edersheim was either a prophet or history always repeats itself when we don't learn from the generations that have gone before us. This is why Christian revivals alone are not enough. Even our own Christian history tells us that mankind strays from the written word of God, if not always by letter or outward appearance, but almost certainly by action, inaction, deceit, ambition as well as many other vices. The Jews didn't always get it right, and neither have we as modern Christians. A quick look at any Muslim or other religious teaching will uncover worse vices than that of heathenism, for at least some heathens make mention of murder as sin, while portions of the Koran certainly condone it. Obviously we cannot force people to follow the Scriptures. Those of us that make the best attempts to follow the Bible also fall short, whether by outward attitude or inward thought. Perfection is not a quality that man possesses, but it is the very essence of who God is. Only Christ offers us this indwelling of the Holy Spirit to help us overcome that nature of sin that so easily overtakes every human. On a daily basis, as we continually yield to the holy nature of Christ, we overcome anger, greed, lust and a host of other ills. As we yield our nature to Christ's nature, perfection is walked out one step at a time for each of us. It may take a life time, but as that happens, the standards of a society are raised and safety, freedom, liberty and justice become common place.

As a society refuses the standards of Christ and His word, safety, freedom, liberty and justice are eroded and even obliterated. The foundation for this is in early childhood. If it is not taught there, then it must be taught somewhere in life for the standards of that human life to be raised. Thus the need for the study and teaching of the word of God and the nature of God as a basic foundation. Let me also quickly note that without the Holy Spirit's desire to have a relationship with us and His ability to reside within us, no amount of teaching could help. The letter of the law kills, but the Spirit always gives us life (2 Corinthians 3:6).

While our study here over the next year will certainly not be comprehensive (a lifetime of study may not be considered such), we need to start somewhere. So without further ado, let's get started. When I look at the life of Christ I see a foundation that was laid out for His coming. This foundation was laid out even before the world began (See Hebrews 10:5; Revelation 13:8). To me this represents a spiritual foundation so that we as humans can understand the fullness and intensity of a God that can prepare for His people long before a people exists. God did this supernaturally within a natural framework. In other words, His people would have to understand the secular nature of the world as well as the spiritual one. And that it was the spiritual that ordered the natural because God was the author or master architect that ordered both. That is why the book of Leviticus is called the book of order. It orders a spiritual people to do literal work. This is so ingrained in the Jew

that there is a secular calendar as well as a religious one. In the secular calendar the seventh month Tishrei starts the year and in the religious calendar, the month Nisan starts it. Our Jewish brethren had a very intense and exacting foundation laid down for programmed study of God and His Word. Children were taught to memorize the Scriptures. They understood the spiritual applications of these truths because the book of Leviticus ordered these spiritual concepts into everyday life. In other words, their lives were mainly agricultural. The book of Leviticus taught them how to treat their livestock, each other and the livestock of their neighbors. The book of Leviticus also taught them the various sacrifices and the reason for each. We know God did this to teach them Christ (Galatians 3:24; Psalm 40:7, 8; Hebrews 10:5-7)). The Law (Ten Commandments) held spiritual concepts for practical purposes. The concept of honoring our parents so that things may go well with us is a simple example of honoring relationships for future spiritual blessings that would work itself out into everyday life. Now imagine what goes on in our society today and compare it with the concepts of honor and integrity seen in the first five books of the Old Testament (the Torah or Pentateuch) and you can understand why we have the spiritual as well as the physical problems that we have.

Jewish children of Jesus' time period would be required to know the Shema (Deuteronomy 6:4-9; 11:13-21; Numbers 15:37-41), the Hallel (Psalm 113-118), the history of the Creation to that of the Flood,

and the first eighteen chapters of the book of Leviticus. During at least our Lord's era there were little parchment rolls that had these writings on them that were especially made for children. There were also schools attached to many synagogues which instructed children further than this. But even before this age (age five on) the reading of whatever portion of the word of God a family owned would be heard. Edersheim quotes Philo as writing these words concerning the Jews: "Jews were, from their swaddling clothes, even before being taught either the sacred laws or the unwritten customs, trained by their parents, teachers and instructors to recognize God as Father and as the maker of the world, and that having been taught the knowledge (of the laws) from earliest youth, they bore in their souls the image of the commandments." (Ibid, p 103) This happened through many different avenues, whether from the Mezuzah hanging by the front door or the wearing of regular phylacteries (like the Mezuzah which hung near the entry of the home, these were little boxes containing parchment rolls of the word of God) to celebrating the weekly, monthly, as well as the yearly feasts and to attending the Temple rituals (applicable to children and while there was a temple standing) God and His word, nature and attributes were, so to speak, written upon their hearts. For those reading this that did not grow up in homes where you attended a weekly catechism or Sunday school or where prayers and the reading of the Bible were not a part of your young life, you have a little catching up to do. Please don't get

discouraged, no matter what your age is. The Bible has promised us that as we read and follow our Lord, the Holy Spirit will bring all things necessary for us to remembrance and He will instruct us concerning Jesus and the Word of God (See John 14, 15 & 17).

So the first mandatory issue is getting God's word into your spirit, either by reading or hearing the reading of the Bible. As far as what translation is right for you, that really is up to you. As long as the translation is a literal one and approved by most Christian denominations, it really is a personal decision between you and the Lord. I usually ask this question: When you read a translation, which one do you remember easily enough to quote from by memory? Whichever translation that is, is probably the one you should read regularly. Remember though, that as we age we change. Some people remember Scripture no matter what Bible they read and others need that constant repeating of the same exact word phrases flowing through them. Once you have read through the Scriptures at least two to five times (and preferably within a year) you are ready for foundational instruction. I should also mention that as you read the Bible, your private life will get progressively better. Overnight change is wonderful and exciting, but you might be surprised to know that not everyone is perfect immediately! Don't become discouraged if you find yourself less than faultless! Trust me, over time you will improve---if you want to and if you yield to the Holy Spirit. God alone holds your ideal in His hands. Trust Him and listen to the

Holy Spirit. It won't help you if you get frustrated and quit because you don't think you're good enough. And it certainly won't help if pride and your own perfection is all you think about. The goal is to be the reflection of Jesus that God wants to see, not the reflection of a certain set of man-ordained statutes! Continue to read the Bible and make the changes the Holy Spirit asks of you. Before you know it, you will see the change in no time.

We will only have space enough this month to touch upon one of the first foundational teachings from the word. For this we also use a book I have found over the years to be invaluable. You don't need the book to go through this study, but if you do, I can guarantee that the purchase will be worth it. The name of the book is "Laying the Foundation, Achieving Christian Maturity," by James Lee Beall. It is published by Bridge-Logos Publishers out of Gainesville, Florida (USA). You can get it from their website, www.bridge-logos.com. If you cannot use the Internet, you can write or call our ministry. We keep some here. You can send us a check or money order with your address and we will ship it to you. What I like about this book is that it forces people to have their Bibles next to them as they do the study. Beall works entirely from Hebrews 6:1-3, which is our study Scripture this month.

"Therefore let us leave the elementary teachings about Christ and go on to maturity, not laying again the foundation of repentance from acts that lead to death, and

of faith in God, instruction about baptisms, the laying on of hands, the resurrection of the dead, and eternal judgment. And God permitting, we will do so." (Hebrews 6:1-3, NIV) This portion of Scripture is so meaty and rich with nutrients for the young believer, that it is no wonder Beall's book takes some 388 pages to cover the principles mentioned here. We will be starting a 6-month course this year at our ministry for those who want to take it. Suffice it to say, that our space allotted here is not enough. I will only be able to address the basics. First of all, we should take notice that we find this method of initial instruction in the elementary teachings of Christ in the book written to the Hebrews. So before you go any farther, I suggest reading through Hebrews at least once. Whoever the author was, he had an intimate knowledge of the Jewish priesthood, and his command of Greek is excellent, if not somewhat eloquent. We find out so much about the early Jews who believed Jesus was the Messiah from this epistle, though its purpose was not intended for that. The author wrote, it seems, to a group of Jewish believers that may have needed a little more proof of Christ's 'messiah-ship.' In other words, they were not quite 'perfect' in their faith (the KJV and NKJV translate the word maturity in verse one as perfection). Though its purpose is not to tell us about the elementary principles or teachings about "the Christ" (as the NASB translates verse one), we get an excellent list of what was considered basic Christian thought/teaching, much the same as a young Jewish child would be required to have, concerning God. I find this to be no

accident. God is a God of continuity. In the same way as there were basics to Judaism in learning about God, the same principles would apply to Christianity and Christ, now that there was a fuller revelation concerning the Godhead because of Christ's priestly sacrifice. The author was quite literally proving through the Jewish method of argument, in a theologically systematic way, Christ's divinity, priesthood, God's eternal plan and man's involvement in that plan. While that may not have been what he wanted to do, the author had to write what he wrote to prove to these Messianic believers that Jesus was who He said He was.

He exhorts them that it is not necessary to repeat the basic teachings of the Christ and salvation, and then lists six basics. Six is always the number for man all throughout the Bible and these six basics are for man's benefit. The first one is repentance from works that lead to death, or dead works, as most translations put it. The word used for repentance in the Greek is metanoia. The understanding is a mandatory 180 degree change from doing works of the law (good works) for one's salvation and relying totally upon the shed blood of Christ for deliverance. When we study Hebrews as a whole, we come away with the understanding that we have totally broken God's laws and as a result we need a sacrifice to totally deliver us from our sin (dead works is also understood as acts of sinning). Christ is pointed to as that sacrifice. We have to make a heart felt as well as mental choice to stop sinning, stop

thinking wrong and turn towards Christ. The next sentence tells us the vehicle by which we turn toward Christ. That vehicle is faith. In fact, the King James Version translates the next sentence as faith toward God. This is our second basic teaching: faith toward (or in) God. In the New Testament we find three categories of faith. We find saving faith (Romans 10); the kind of leap of faith that you take once you make a decision to first follow Christ. You believe and therefore you have the salvation God has promised. The next type of faith is seen in Galatians 5. It is listed as a fruit of the Spirit. We learn from this list that it is a progressive, believing and evolving faith that takes place as you learn that God is good and can be trusted to do what He says He will do. With each battle won, we learn to trust and believe or have faith in what God will do. This is the faith that grows. The last type of faith is seen in 1 Corinthians 12 and it is listed as one of the gifts of the Holy Spirit. As is suggested it is a gift. It is usually given in conjunction with a ministry act like miracles or healings, signs and wonders, prophecy, etc. It is almost simultaneous with the ministry act. One second there is the thought of what God wants to do and the next second you just believe and do.

The third basic or elementary teaching is that of baptisms. The NASB says, "instruction about washings." Most Bibles translate it as baptisms. It is in its plural form. The Jews had several different reasons for a baptism. We will not discuss them here. Suffice it to say that at least the two

basic types of baptism are focused on here, as an example of the two that our Lord talked about. One is initial baptism as an act of obedience after salvation (Acts 2:38) and the other is the baptism of the Holy Spirit with the evidence of speaking with other tongues as the Spirit gives utterance (Acts 1:5; 2:1-4). As the word baptism suggests, it is a total immersion. You don't get a little of the Holy Spirit and you don't get a little wet! It's sort of like being pregnant, you either are or you are not. The submersion in water is a ritual with spiritual significance. There is the death to the old self and way of life by going under the water (a cutting away of the old flesh as in circumcision) and a resurrection from the water to newness of life. The baptism in the Holy Spirit with the evidence of speaking with other tongues is also an immersion. Jesus said that out of believers' bellies would flow rivers of living water after the Holy Spirit came upon them (John 7:38, 39). Like water baptism, Christian life is impossible without the baptism of the Holy Spirit. For once you have died in Christ, what gives new life except the Holy Spirit indwelling and living through us? I've often been asked that if someone died immediately after salvation and they had no time to be baptized, would they still go to heaven. My answer is yes. The thief on the cross next to Jesus had no time or opportunity for baptism and Jesus said that it would be that day that he would be with Him in paradise (Luke 23:43). I have run into people that use that portion of Scripture to avoid baptism; whether pride or rebellion causes them to disobey the Lord in this respect, I do not know. But I can say

that willfully disobeying the Holy Spirit (unless genuine repentance is made) will not allow us access to heaven's gate. So I encourage all who can, to actively seek water as well as Holy Spirit baptism as soon as is humanly possible.

The fourth basic teaching is the laying on of hands. There are five circumstances or opportunities for this within the framework of the New Testament: healings, deliverance, for the baptism of the Holy Spirit, for the gifts of the Spirit and for the confirming of the body or confirming of ministers by the presbyters. (A few Scriptures to chew on: Mark 16:15-18; Acts 9:10, 17; Luke 11:20; Luke 4:40, 41; Acts 8:18-20; Mark 10:13-16; 1 Timothy 4:14.) What I stress here is the tender and Godly affirmation that is involved in each of these circumstances. Hands are for Godly and appropriate giving/affirmation, not pushing or shoving or anything else. All throughout the Bible we see hands used for transference of something spiritual, especially in the case of sacrifice and blessings (Leviticus 1:4; 9:22; Psalm 141:2; Deuteronomy 34:9). It is so because God's hands are full of power and authority (Exodus 15:6; Matthew 20:21). The fifth basic teaching is that of the resurrection of the dead. That we are raised from the dead should not surprise anyone. What many believers are surprised about is the type of body that we have. When Christ rose from the grave He had both a spiritual as well as physical body (John 20:19, 26). He could walk through a building without opening a door, yet He ate with the believers and told them to feel and touch Him, that He

wasn't just some floating ghost (Luke 24:13-48; John 20:27-31; 21:7-15a). As we see later on in the book of Revelation, the need for a glorified body in heaven is mandatory, for obviously our earthly bodies alone just could not hold up to the glory surrounding God's heavenly dwelling. Paul teaches on this principle in 1 Corinthians 15.

The sixth and last basic instruction that we see in Hebrews is that of eternal judgment. It is, to use an American saying, where the rubber meets the road. If God did not judge the living and the dead at some literal point in time, there would be no need for salvation. We could all continue on our merry little way and live however we chose. That the Bible talks about two different judgments that are literal and eternal should not surprise us. They are both mentioned in Revelation 20. One is the judgment seat of Christ, where believers are judged for what they did for Jesus and the gifts given them to expand His kingdom and the other is the Great White throne judgment where those who refused Christ's invitation are judged and sent to hell for eternity. Studying about these judgments helps to keep things in perspective for us. It makes us realize that there is a time where earth's boundaries will not affect us. It lets us know that hell is a real place and it keeps us focused so we don't sweat the little stuff here on earth.

I haven't been able to go into detail with each teaching, but I have given you a general idea of what the basics are concerning these six foundational principles. I encourage you to study on your own. You

can always write or email questions or comments, as some of you have done in the past. We have appreciated hearing from you. Many of you are awesome ministers with great insights from the Holy Spirit. Don't keep your lights under baskets---pass on what the Lord has taught you! Log on next month for more.....

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