

## 1 Corinthians 3:5-15 “The Lord’s Building Project” 1/22/23

A fellow stopped at a gas station and, while he was there, he watched a couple of men working along the roadside - One man would dig a hole two or three feet deep and then move on

The other man came along behind and filled in the hole - While one was digging a new hole, the other was about 25 feet behind filling in the old

The men worked right past the fellow at the gas station and went on down the road - “I can’t stand this, I’ve got to find out what they are doing” thought the man as he went down the road toward the workers

“Hold on,” he said to the men, “Can you tell me what’s going on here with this digging?” - “Well, we work for the State of New Jersey,” one of the men said

“But one of you is digging a hole and the other fills it up. You’re not accomplishing anything. Aren’t you wasting the State’s money?”

“You don’t understand, mister,” one of the men said, leaning on his shovel and wiping his brow. “Normally there’s three of us: me, Sam, and Jesse

“I dig the hole, Sam sticks in the tree and Jesse here puts the dirt back. Now, just because Sam is sick, that doesn’t mean that Jesse and I can’t work, does it?”<sup>1</sup>

Today’s Epistle lesson is not about working for the State of New Jersey - But instead it is about the important work of sharing the Gospel and building up the body of Christ

God has given the Church many different Spiritual gifts - And today’s passage reflects on how those varying gifts may be used for the task of sharing Jesus with others

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<sup>1</sup> Ed Vasicek, [www.SermonCentral.com](http://www.SermonCentral.com)

Paul uses two illustrations to show the different gifts various leaders bring to the Church - First he speaks about gardening - And then about building

The story is told of a woman who had a totally beautiful garden in her back yard - One day her pastor was visiting and admiring that garden

The pastor remarked, "You and the Lord certainly have a beautiful garden here" - At that, the woman replied, "yes, but you should have seen it when the Lord was taking care of it all by Himself"

Those of you with nice gardens know there is a lot of work that goes into it - We may till, and plant, and water, and fertilize, and weed - Yet, even the best gardener will admit that the way things grow, as well as that rain thing, are definitely places where we rely on God

The same goes for serving the Lord - And sharing Jesus with others - We may be faithful in sharing our faith with others - Or inviting them to join us at Church - Or urging them to accept Christ as their Savior - But it is God who brings the growth, it is God who brings the transformation of a New Life in Christ Jesus

As the Apostle Paul wrote, "What then is Apollos? What is Paul? Servants through whom you believed, as the Lord assigned to each. I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth."<sup>2</sup>

Once we read past the gardening illustration, Paul writes about building - We, the followers of Jesus Christ are called to be constantly building - Not so much with hammers and nails or bricks and mortar - But we are called to build up the Kingdom of God

To share the Gospel with our words and actions - To seek converts - To lead them to the Lord - And to disciple new believers - To feed and enrich the Body of Christ

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<sup>2</sup> 1 Corinthians 3:5-6 - Scripture quoted has been taken from The Holy Bible, English Standard Version,  
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When we dedicate ourselves to that task - We realize that the foundation is already laid - As the hymn writer wrote, "The Church's one foundation is Jesus Christ her Lord"<sup>3</sup>

We do not need to start to build a Church on that solid foundation either - There are centuries of building that has taken place already

A story is told of a pastor who was retiring after 25 years in the ministry - As he came to clear out the bedroom of the parsonage, he found a small bowl with 5 eggs and \$5,000 in it

Baffled he called his wife and said: Darling, what is this little basket under the bed with five eggs and \$5,000 in it - "Oh" she said "I must confess that every time you preach a bad sermon, I put an egg in the bowl"

Secretly the pastor was pleased: "Not bad, five bad sermons in 25 years" he thought - "And what about the \$5,000?" he asked - She said, "Well every time I get a dozen eggs, I sell them!"<sup>4</sup>

Even if we share Jesus as poorly as that pastor probably did, God has given us other gifts to build up the Church - We are called to faithfully to serve God with whatever gift we have been given - Building up His Church - And trusting in the Lord to grant us the increase

Our passage continues, "For no one can lay a foundation other than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. Now if anyone builds on the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw—each one's work will become manifest, for the Day will disclose it"<sup>5</sup>

The Apostle Paul wrote about an interesting choice of building materials: gold, silver, costly stones, wood, hay or straw - With the exception of wood, these materials are hardly the choice of most contractors in that day or in ours today

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<sup>3</sup> "The Church's One Foundation," Samuel J. Stone, Twelve Hymns of the Twelve Articles of the Apostle's Creed, © Public Domain, originally published 1866, (Messers, Parker, & Co., London, England)

<sup>4</sup> Rev. Martin Dale, England, as quoted by [www.SermonCentral.com](http://www.SermonCentral.com)

<sup>5</sup> 1 Corinthians 3:11-13a

Paul is not actually referring to things like gold, silver, wood or straw - But to the different efforts people bring to the Kingdom - Of the various levels of sacrifice that people are willing to make in offering their gifts

Some of us feel there is nothing too good for the Lord our God - And we are building with gold, silver, and precious stones - Others are willing to devote things like hay or straw to the project

Then one day all will be tested with fire - The wood, hay, and straw are gone - Burned to ash - But the work done in gold, silver, and precious stones remains - And maybe it is even refined by the fire

Notice that this testing by fire is not a test of salvation - Verses 14-15 “If the work that anyone has built on the foundation survives, he will receive a reward. If anyone's work is burned up, he will suffer loss, though he himself will be saved, but only as through fire”

Those who are building with inferior materials, building with lackadaisical and half-hearted efforts will see little or no reward for their mediocre efforts - But those making their best efforts will see great reward

The issue is the level of the reward - Those who are generously building on the foundation of Jesus Christ with their best efforts - Are going to see their work endure - And God's Word promises they will receive a reward

Even in our personal walk of faith, our choice of building materials makes a big difference and it does matter what we are building upon

If we are following the ways of the world - Or even worse, if we are placing our faith in the things of this world we are doomed - Our riches, our jobs, our homes, our reputations, and even our families, are not going to save us - All of these things are good things, but they will not endure to eternity - And they are not able to bring us salvation

If we are placing our faith in religion - In how much we give, on how busy we are at Church, on how faithful we are with our tithe, on how often we attend Church, we still lost - All of these things are also good things, but they will not endure to eternity - They are not able to save us

Only putting our trust in Christ gives us a solid place to build our faith - Our Lord Jesus said, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me"<sup>6</sup>

Or in the words of Edward Mote, "My hope is built on nothing less than Jesus' blood and righteousness . . . On Christ the solid rock I stand, all other ground is sinking sand"<sup>7</sup>

Finally, consider one more thing about this passage - In the illustration of gardening: Paul plants, Apollos watered, and God granted the increase - In the building illustration, God laid a firm foundation on Christ Jesus - And others built on that

This work of building the Kingdom of God is not something we do alone - Maybe we will only plant a seed of faith in someone's life - Another leads that person to Christ - Another brings the new believer into the fellowship of a Church - Another opens God's Word and shows the person all the treasures there - Another mentors and guides that person's walk of faith

The point is that even if we play a very small part in someone's faith journey - That small part is still important - Even if we never see the results of our sharing Jesus with someone - That seed we plant may be very important - Because sharing the love of Jesus while trusting in God can mean that incredible miracles will happen

As followers of Jesus, we are to be a part of the Lord's building project - We are to use the best materials - Humbly doing whatever God has equipped us to do - And always building on the solid foundation of Christ Jesus our Lord

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<sup>6</sup> from John 14:6

<sup>7</sup> from "My Hope Is Built," Edward Mote, 1834, © public domain