

“GOD'S HOUSE, OUR CHURCH”
1 Corinthians 3:10-15

By Pastor YAU
October 16, 2016

INTRODUCTION:

1) When problems invade your house: I don't think you need me to tell you that you will have headaches when your house is having problems. The size of the problem dictates the size of your headache. In recent months, a couple of families in our church have had pretty good-sized problems in their houses. Even our church building is having problems, from the dirty steeple to the cracking parking lot to the leaking roof and dirty carpets. We all know that things made by human hands with earthly materials will deteriorate in time and problems will come, sometimes sooner than we expect. None of us likes that, but we have to live with it.

2) When problems invade God's house: Yes, I am talking about the church. Although Jesus is the founder of the original church (Matt 16:18), not all churches after that were built and kept in the right ways, according to the teaching of his Word. We have heard about and seen many churches that got destroyed not just by the work of Satan on the outside, but also by the lousy work of people on the inside who claimed to be Christians but didn't do or follow the Bible in building the church and keeping it together free of problems. Yes, I also realize that we all are just human beings, and we all make mistakes even with our best intention to do right. By looking at the Bible and trying harder to follow its guidelines closely and truthfully, we may avoid some of the problems that have destroyed many churches near and far.

THE BACKGROUND OF THIS PASSAGE: 3:10-17 was written to deal with the division in the Corinthian Church described in 1:10-17, and 3:1-9, where Paul sadly recognized that church was lacking spiritual quality, 3:1-5. Paul pointed out the ultimate owner of the church is God, not man, not even popular, very gifted leaders like Apollos and Paul. To keep the church unified the first thing is to start it right and to keep it right; that is from 3:10-17.

THE PURPOSE OF THIS MESSAGE: Build and keep the church together: There are biblical guidelines on how to build and maintain God's house so it will stand tall, trouble-free and undivided. The text today provides us some clear steps we all can follow so we won't fall victim of a failing and falling church. We need to have the following important components:

FIRST, WE NEED A MASTER BUILDER: “By the grace God has given me, I laid a foundation as an expert builder.” (3:10)

1) A builder by the grace of God: In many cases and whenever Paul talked about his life and work, he always credited the grace of God. On the fact he was saved he said, “Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am the worst. But for that very reason, I was shown mercy (grace).” (1 Tim 1:15-16) On his call to gospel ministry, he always credited the grace of Jesus on him. Grace, *xarion*, a gift given freely to someone undeserving. Jesus called Saul, later known as Paul, to gospel ministry, not because of his personal qualities, knowledge of the OT law, or his well

disciplined life as a Pharisee; Paul saw all these as rubbish, garbage, a filthy rag. Here we see the quality of Paul's humility when he talked about building God's house, the church. If we want to build a church for God that will stand under any and all conditions, we need someone who is called of God and has that down-to-earth attitude of humility. He is chosen by God, sent by God, depends on God to build.

2) A builder who knows what to do: An “expert” or “master” builder is one word, *architekton*, architect, who is trained and has learned and accumulated expertise by experience in doing his trade. This word means more about design than the actual work of construction. This master builder knows how to design a house of God, from the layout, the blueprints, the structure, the materials that might be needed, to the functions of the building, etc. Some Bible scholars refer to the training Paul received in the years he spent in Tarsus (Acts 9:30, 11:25), where he devoted his time in preparation for the ministry Jesus called him to. Paul needed to unlearn his past in the Jewish religion and the teaching of the Pharisees, which is mainly legalism. Jesus taught him a new message of salvation through faith not by deeds. We see it clearly here that in order to build a house of God, the church, we need someone who is trained by Jesus, has the spiritual know-how to plan, to design, to work to bring it along. It is very important that we know this: The builder who wants to build a house for God isn't motivated by human desire, as David was. God never wanted King David to build his house. This builder needs to have a deep relationship with God, as King David did. But he must also have the spiritual insight to know God's heart, and he will do his job by obeying God, following

God's leadership, and depending on God's power.

THEN, WE NEED THE PERFECT FOUNDATION: “By the grace God has given me, I laid a foundation... No one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ.” (3:10-11)

1) The foundation of Jesus Christ: “By the grace God has given me, I laid a foundation which is Jesus Christ.” No one needs any further discussion to see the importance of a foundation to a house or any structure. In the conclusion of the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus summed up his teaching on Christian life with a parable about building on a firm foundation. (Matthew 7:24-27) Regardless of the size of the structure, be it just a residential house or the Eiffel Tower or the new World Trade Center, nothing is more important than the foundation these structures are built on. If we are going to build a house of God, the church, Jesus is the foundation we need to build on. This means everything in the church, from the purpose of the church, the ministry of the church, the leaders of the church, and the way business is conducted; all must follow the teaching of Jesus in the Bible. The Bible should be the only foundation of doctrine and practice in all areas of the church. Pastors, leaders and members of the church must subscribe and be subject to the authority of the Bible.

2) The risks of other foundations: “No one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid.” (3:11) Throughout the 2,000 years of Christian history, there have been many attempts to build the church on other foundations, be it a movement, a denomination or a church. These attempts

involved changing the doctrine, the focus, the purpose and the practice of the church into something that isn't a church any more. Paul warned all of God's people not to allow anyone to lay any foundation that is not Jesus Christ. We have seen denominations, churches or Christian groups that strayed away from the only foundation Paul had laid. They still called themselves church, but did not follow what Jesus Christ wanted them to do. These people argue that since the world is progressing, so the church must follow the progressive trend to be relevant. So, some follow the secular culture, some follow the social norms. Others follow political trends closely tied to a political power base. Then, the church flows with the world, instead of rescuing the lost world as Jesus wants us do.

THIRD, WE WANT THE BEST MATERIALS: “Each one should be careful how he builds... If a man builds on this foundation using gold, silver, precious stones, or wood, hay and straw.” (3:10, 12)

1) Be careful in choosing materials: We signed a contract in 1995 for our new home near the church. To save few thousand dollars, we chose to use bricks only on one side of the house, but used veneer siding on the other three sides, and used vinyl on the kitchen and bathroom floors. Everything seemed fine at first, but some things deteriorated so fast in only a few years that the exterior needed to be repainted and the vinyl floors got worn out, curled up and needed to be replaced. It is so true “you get what you pay for.” When Paul used gold, silver and precious stones as symbols of highly valued materials to build a house for God, he wanted us to put the best of what we have into the church: our best ability, best

efforts, best heart and mind, best intention and dedication, to build and keep the church standing strong. No church can stand strong for long if the materials we put in are cheap and easily disintegrate. When we put our best into the house of God, our hearts are also there for the church. This represents the commitment and love we put into God's kingdom.

2) Temptation of inferior materials: “Wood, hay and straw” represent materials that are cheap, of low value and easily deteriorate. This is about the quality and attitude we need to consider when we are dealing with God and his church: Do we give God our best? In early Christian history, God's people gave to the church their utmost and their best. That's why those churches are still the most beautiful, best decorated and furnished in all the major cities in Europe and the United States. Paul isn't talking about our material gifts to God's church. Instead, he is talking about our spiritual offering, our service, our heart and efforts to his church. Anything less than the best isn't what God is pleased to accept. We all know to give our best for our family, and we need to do the same for God's house. All things less than the best will cause the church to suffer and deteriorate, crumble and even be destroyed.

FINALLY, THE QUALITY OF THE HOUSE:

1) There will be times of testing: “His work will be shown for what it is, because the Day will bring it to light. It will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test the quality of each man's work.” (3:13) Throughout the 2,000 years history of God's church, every church has gone through many tests to reveal the quality, the choice of foundation, the materials

used, the structure and the effectiveness of that church. Some tests come from the outside, such as political opposition, war and social bombardments and heresy invasion. Others come from internal erosion, fights and division. Times like these test to see the quality of the people who compose that church, the kind of foundation they built the church on, the way they handle church problems, conflicts and the ability they show to keep harmony and unity among the people. Churches of all sizes will have time to see their true nature when tests come on them. A peaceful appearance in good times is always easy. It is in difficult times that you can see if they had the right builder and the right material that built the church the right way.

2) There will be reward and loss: “If what he has built survives, he will receive his reward. If it is burned up, he will suffer loss.” (3:14-15) In many teachings of Jesus and Paul on Christian life, there is an offer of reward after the commands of duty. Our God is a just God, and he will reward the faithful and punish those who are not. Here Paul calls our attention to the ultimate results of our life and the life of the church. How we build God's church, how we handle God's business, whether we are giving him our best or just leftovers, all will come to light in the test of fire or water. (Matt 7:24-27) If we are cutting corners, putting our personal agenda before the church's, focusing on what is good for me rather than for God and his church, we will suffer loss in the test. On the other hand, if we put God and his church first in our dedication and sacrifices, put God's house first in our priority list, then God will reward us individually and corporately as a church. Then our church and our life will be able to stand in times of tests

of fire or water.

THINGS WE MUST DO:

1) Things pastors and leaders must do: “So, men ought to regard us as servants of Christ. . .and it is required that those who have been given a trust must prove faithful.” (1 Cor 4:1-

2) Paul testified about the seriousness of being given the trust by Christ to be servants in God's work. Putting God and his church on top of the priority list of life is what God asks of his servants, particularly pastors and leaders. When we are called and given the honor to be pastors and leaders, we need to place God and his church on top of all the things we do. We see this in the lives of the prophets in the OT, the disciples in the NT and in all faithful servants throughout history. If we want to see a growing church, a strong church, it flows from pastors and leaders.

2) Things all God's people must do: “Don't you know that you yourselves are God's temple and that God's Spirit lives in you?” (3:16) Pastors are builders, but it is the building material that decides the value and strength of the church, if it will stand under attacks of fire or water. If all people in the church put in their very best, like gold, silver and precious stones, the church will stand firm under any condition. All members need to know that they are the temple of God, and pastors are just builders. The quality of a church depends on the quality of the people. The Spirit of God lives in all God's people to guide us, lead us, strengthen us, so we can give our best to God for his church. We all want to see our church

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