

Christ Reformation Church

Tillamook, Oregon

You Must be Born Again!

“The habit of preachers today is to address their people as though they were all Christians and just need instruction...men and women are being treated as saved who never knew they were lost.” [Lloyd-Jones]

*“In my lifetime I did not care to hear that word that cut me most, and showed me my lost estate aright. I was vexed to hear my sins mentioned, and laid to my charge. I loved him best, who deceived me most; who said, Peace, peace, when there was no such thing.” (Jer. 5:30,31).
[Bunyan, John. A FEW SIGHS FROM HELL]*

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The Day the Building Inspector Comes

August 4, 2024

Sermon Text: 1 Corinthians 3:9-23

Scripture Reading: 1 Corinthians 3:9-23

You can go to YouTube and find videos that building inspectors

have posted of buildings under construction that they have inspected. Even in brand new construction, performed by a contractor and sub-contractors, it is incredible how shoddy the work can be. Framing errors, wiring or plumbing errors. One outdoor deck was so bad that the inspector said the best thing to do would be to tear in down.

Here in First Corinthians, the Apostle Paul uses building

construction as an illustration of how all Christians, but particularly pastors and teachers and other church leaders must be certain that they are building not only with quality materials, but upon the one and only approved foundation, which is Jesus Christ.

Here in verses 15-17 Paul tells us that there are two errors which will not stand the test of Christ's examining fire when He comes again. One is much more serious than the other because it is the work of false teachers – wolves in wool. The other error is serious as well but it is the error of building upon a right foundation, but using non-approved building materials.

Let's go in for a closer look. Listen again:

1Co 3:11-17 For no one can lay a foundation other than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. (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. (14) If the work that anyone has built on the foundation survives, he will receive a reward.

(15) If anyone's work is burned up, he will suffer loss, though he himself will be saved, but only as through fire.

(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.

Here then is this imagery of the church as a building. As a temple. This is not the only place Paul uses this illustration:

Eph 2:19-22 So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, (20) built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, (21) in whom the

whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord. (22) In him you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit.

This temple is under construction. The foundation has been laid, that being Jesus Christ Himself. Christ He is, as the old hymn puts it, The Church's One Foundation. The body of Christ, the temple of God, is HIM, and all who are born again through faith in Him are part of Him, part of His body, part of His temple, the church.

Now, the only way that the temple of the Lord grows is by the building stones being joined upon and to HIM. We are those stones:

1Pe 2:4-5 As you come to him, a living stone rejected by men but in the sight of God chosen and precious, (5) you yourselves like living stones are being built up as a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.

How then is the building built? How does the temple grow? It only grows by the gospel – the preaching of the apostles and prophets, as quickened or made living and powerful by the Holy Spirit. *If more living stones are to be added to this one and only foundation, then these “others who are building upon the foundation Paul laid” (see vs 10) MUST be building on Christ AND they must be using gold, silver and precious stones as building materials to add to that foundation.*

All of this is to say that we all, especially pastors and teachers, MUST be able to say the same as Paul, *“For I determined to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified.”* This is how the builders must build – *the Word of the cross*. ONLY this and this ONLY will add genuine living stones to the Temple.

Now, as we mentioned earlier, Paul warns us against two serious errors in working to build Christ's Church. Here is the first:

1Co 3:15 If anyone's work is burned up, he will suffer loss, though he himself will be saved, but only as through fire.

This is curious, isn't it? This phrase – *though he himself will be saved*. What does Paul mean? Well, he is referring to Christians, to builders of the church, especially church leaders, who are guilty of using inferior materials to build on the foundation. Wood, hay stubble. Things that burn up when subjected to Christ's searching fire. And yet, though they were guilty of this, they *suffer loss BUT they themselves will be saved*. What does this mean?

Paul is referring to Christians who really are Christians. People who hold to the foundation – Jesus Christ and Him crucified. However – and this brings us back to that same old problem which plagued Corinth and which plagues the church today – pride. Arrogance. Boastfulness. Worldly wisdom. Working to build the church by means of worldly wisdom and methods.

What is going to happen when Christ comes and subjects the work of such people to His scrutinizing fiery judgment? *Everything they have built is going to go up in smoke. They will be like people who just escaped a burning building bringing nothing with them.* NOTHING. No reward.

What does this teach us? (and it is very sobering as it is meant to be) –

A person can spend their entire life working and working to, as they claim to be, build Christ's church, perhaps adding thousands of people to a visible church, drawing huge crowds, building huge church buildings, and yet in the end it is all for nothing. Wood, hay, stubble up in smoke.

I have no doubt at all that “the first will be last and the last, first” when Christ comes. That many big names in Christendom will barely escape the judgment with the clothes on their back. Why? WHY?

Because of this:

They built, they used methods, they embraced a mindset, which was worldly wisdom.

Now, let's pause for a moment and let this really sink in. Someone says, "look at what we built. Look at this church. Look at these buildings. Look at the crowds of people. Surely we have done a great work of building Christ's church."

But what is going to happen? Well, the whole thing was done according to the world's thinking. According to the world's methods. Let me ask you – *is it not true that many, many local churches and pastors and elders and denominations, are using the same methods that the world's corporations use?* Let me give some examples:

- Marketing methods and techniques
- Creation of "spiritual" climate with mood-setting music and lighting
- A preacher who utilizes "dynamic" speaking styles

- Architecture designed to attract the crowds
- And now we get closer to the really dangerous methods – only preaching part of God's Word, part of God's character, the parts that won't be as objectionable to people
- Introducing human philosophies into the teaching
- Designing entertainment oriented programs for children and youth

Wood, hay, stubble – Christians who also only escape the flames barely. That is what the world produces. And many more, as we are about to see, who do not escape the flames because the wisdom of the world entertained their flesh but neutralized the power of the gospel.

Do you understand? Do you see how widespread this evil is today in the churches? **AND DO YOU SEE WHY WE MUST BE ON GUARD AGAINST THIS?** This is no rare evil.

“The Apostle here is speaking of those teachers who, although they retain the fundamental doctrines of the gospel, yet combine them with error. This is plain from verse 12, ‘If any man shall build on this foundation.’ It is not enough, therefore, that a minister hold fast to the fundamentals of truth; he must take heed *what he teaches in connection with that truth*. If he mingles with it the wood, hay, and stubble of his own philosophy, he will find himself a loser on the day of judgment. He will escape with his life, as a man is rescued from a burning building. His salvation will not only be effected with difficulty, but it will be attended with great loss. He will occupy a lower place in the kingdom of heaven.”

‘The unfaithful builders deserve to be thus punished because they are engaged in the erection of no ordinary building. They are not raising up a house for themselves, to be constructed of what materials and on whatever plan may suit their taste. They are building the temple of God. This truth the Corinthians seem to have forgotten, for they

regarded their teachers as men allowed to preach their own speculations, and valued them according to their proficiency in “the wisdom of words.”

[Charles Hodge, Commentary on 1 Corinthians, Geneva series]

See it? *When the world’s wisdom is introduced as a philosophy or practice in the church, at best that which it produces will go up in flames one day.* Such are MANY local churches today.

Is this not a picture of this very thing? Were Hophni and Phineas themselves saved? We are not told, but it may well be that they were not since even their roasted bodies were cast out. Nevertheless this is an example of building according to man’s wisdom –

Lev 10:1-3 Now Nadab and Abihu, the sons of Aaron, each took his censer and put fire in it and laid incense on it and offered unauthorized fire before the LORD, which he had not commanded them. (2) And fire

came out from before the LORD and consumed them, and they died before the LORD. (3) Then Moses said to Aaron, “This is what the LORD has said: ‘Among those who are near me I will be sanctified, and before all the people I will be glorified.’” And Aaron held his peace.

A Still More Serious Error – Destroying the Temple of God

Listen once more:

1Co 3:16-18 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.

(18) Let no one deceive himself. If anyone among you thinks that he is wise in this age, let him become a fool that he may become wise.

I include verse 18 here just to remind you what the root of the problem is – *thinking we are wise in this age and applying the*

wisdom of the world instead of embracing the wisdom of God which is foolishness to the world.

This second case, as I have said, this second kind of church “builder,” is not someone who still holds to the foundation, to the Word of the Cross, to the gospel. No, this is someone whose error is so deviant that he doesn't even build with inferior materials. This builder DESTROYS the temple of God. Tears it down. Sets up an entirely different foundation – other than that which was laid by Christ, the prophets, and the apostles. In other words, these are wolves. And Paul is issuing what should be a terrifying promise to such wolves. Rome and all who preach its false gospel is a clear example. The cults can be included here. But as we will see, there are many other false builders in Protestantism as well.

The church is God's temple

You, as an individual Christian, and YOU as the church, are the temple of God. How is that?

Because God's Spirit dwells in you.
Let's think more about this.

What is a temple? It is a building, a structure, in which a god is said to live. Pagans have had their temples, often with an image of their god inside. Think of Dagon back in the days of Samson.

A temple then is a place where a god meets with his people. The problem with all of these pagan temples of course is that the god is an idol who cannot see or hear.

But very early in Scripture we see that the living and true God desires to dwell with His people – Eden was the first temple. Then you had the tabernacle in the wilderness –

Exo 29:44-45 I will consecrate the tent of meeting and the altar. Aaron also and his sons I will consecrate to serve me as priests. (45) I will dwell among the people of Israel and will be their God.

As we advance through Scripture and God's plan of redemption in Christ advances, God's temple

advances in such a way that the Lord's dwelling with His people becomes closer and closer. Solomon's temple is built, destroyed, rebuilt and enlarged. Because of the people's persistent sin, the Lord departs from His temple *and does not return until the Lord Jesus enters this world.* HE is then the temple, God dwelling among us, Immanuel.

Joh 2:19-21 Jesus answered them, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up." (20) The Jews then said, "It has taken forty-six years to build this temple, and will you raise it up in three days?" (21) But he was speaking about the temple of his body.

After His resurrection and ascension – He came even closer to His people.

Joh 14:16-18 And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper, to be with you forever, (17) even the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, for

he dwells with you and will be in you. (18) “I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you.

And THIS is why the Apostle Paul says:

1Co 3:16 Do you not know that you are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in you?

NOTE: God's temple will advance in nearness one more time when the New Creation, the new heavens and earth are ushered in upon Christ's return. The ENTIRE creation will be His temple and we will see Him face to face. His goal will be complete – *I will dwell among them, and they shall be My people, and I will be their God.*

The Christian is holy ground. The true church is holy ground. The temple. The Lord dwells in us. We are to be holy, for He is holy. We stand upon holy ground.

2Co 6:14-18 Do not be unequally yoked with unbelievers. For what partnership has righteousness with lawlessness? Or what fellowship

has light with darkness? (15) What accord has Christ with Belial? Or what portion does a believer share with an unbeliever? (16) What agreement has the temple of God with idols? For we are the temple of the living God; as God said, “I will make my dwelling among them and walk among them, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. (17) Therefore go out from their midst, and be separate from them, says the Lord, and touch no unclean thing; then I will welcome you, (18) and I will be a father to you, and you shall be sons and daughters to me, says the Lord Almighty.”

False prophets, false preachers and teachers who creep in among us preaching a false gospel, strive to destroy God's temple. They deny the only true foundation and set out to build an entirely different temple. At times in history these wolves literally try to destroy the church by killing Christ's people. What does the Lord think of such wolves who dare tear down His Church? *God shall destroy them.* His wrath is against them.

Notice once more the importance of verse 18 in understanding this. I will quote in fact the last verses of this chapter together:

1Co 3:18-23 Let no one deceive himself. If anyone among you thinks that he is wise in this age, let him become a fool that he may become wise. (19) For the wisdom of this world is folly with God. For it is written, “He catches the wise in their craftiness,” (20) and again, “The Lord knows the thoughts of the wise, that they are futile.” (21) So let no one boast in men. For all things are yours, (22) whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas or the world or life or death or the present or the future—all are yours, (23) and you are Christ's, and Christ is God's.

The wisdom of the world, introduced into the preaching and teaching in the church, can not only lead to loss of everything – of the wood, hay, and stubble – but can lead – and often has – to hell. That is the destruction which Paul speaks of here – God will destroy him. As soon as we start preaching

the world's methods and ideas in the church, we are on the road to ruin – *even and perhaps especially when those ideas and methods appear to bring great results.*

“I would say once more what I am profoundly convinced is a terrifying truth, confirmed by my experience more and more, that to be a preacher, an expositor of God's Book, is one of the most dangerous things in the world...If you can listen to God's truth [or preach it] without being terrified at times, then there is something wrong with you.” [Lloyd-Jones, *Christian Warfare, Ephesians Commentary*, p. 177ff]

All things are ours in Christ. Do not boast or take confidence in men and man's methods to build the church. *Do not be envious of men and local churches who seem to be “succeeding” when we here in our small numbers are regarded as a failure by them.*

Jer 45:5 And do you seek great things for yourself? Seek them not, for behold, I am bringing disaster

upon all flesh, declares the LORD. But I will give you your life as a prize of war in all places to which you may go.”

The Day of the Building Inspector is coming. We CAN build with gold, silver and precious stones and thereby receive a reward from Him

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Example of using inferior materials which will go up in smoke on that Day -

“What is the business, the first message, of the gospel? Is it to make men better? And my answer would be that it is not.

‘Well,’ says somebody, ‘I wonder whether the first need of man is not

the need of help? Here he is, battling against temptations and problems and difficulties, so surely his first need is to be helped. By himself he is too weak. Is not the first message of the gospel, therefore, to present Christ to him as someone who can help him to live life and its battles, and to conquer; Christ as the helper?’

No. That is not the first thing.

The first trouble with man is that he is guilty. He does need to be better. He does need help. He does need to get rid of self. I know he does, but before any one of those things, he needs to be put right with God.

Let me prove this to you....What if you died in another minute? There would be no time for you to get better. There would be no time for you to experience this help from Christ. To get rid of self. What if you are in the position of the thief dying upon the cross, who was going to be dead in such a short time? What then? Ah, you see, you must start with your relationship with God. That is man’s first trouble and his first problem. It is

the fact that he is a sinner, a guilty sinner in the presence of God. It is his guilt that must be dealt with first. He is answerable, he is a soul, and he goes out of this life into the next. He stands before God. It may happen at any moment. Therefore that must come first. How can I be right with God? How can I stand in His presence? That is the first thing.” [Martyn Lloyd-Jones, Romans, The Righteous Judgment of God, p. 226-7]