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Sermon Notes

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A Life's Work that Will Survive Judgment Day

1 Corinthians 3:10-15

On August 17, 1999, a massive earthquake hit Izmit, Turkey, resulting in over 17,000 deaths and 45,000 injuries. The overwhelming majority of the deaths were caused by the collapse of new apartment buildings that were poorly built. The shoddy workmanship extended to poor foundations, lack of reinforcing steel rods in the concrete walls and various horrendous practices that constituted criminal negligence. The buildings were not inspected by government officials, and the construction companies cut corners and failed to meet reasonable building codes. When the earthquake hit, the walls and floors crumbled and became the greatest instruments of death in the tragedy.

Similar tragedies have hit in other places as well... shoddy workmanship costing people their lives.

As we come to 1 Corinthians 3:10-15, we have the Apostle Paul's call on all those who work on the church of Jesus Christ to be very careful how they build. The text makes it plain that shoddy workmanship in the construction of the church will be exposed on Judgment Day; Conversely, excellent workmanship will result in an eternal reward.

Jesus warned all of his disciples that we are building a house every moment of our lives... and that the house we are building will someday be tested severely

Matthew 7:24-27 "Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock. ²⁵ The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house; yet it did not fall, because it had its foundation on the rock. ²⁶ But everyone who hears these words of mine and does not put them into practice is like a foolish man who built his house on sand. ²⁷ The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell with a great crash."

Every single one of us is building a house with every action of our lives... Jesus zeroed in on the FOUNDATION of that house... HIM and HIS WORDS... the foundation is faith in Christ and obedience to his words. If we build on Christ and his words, we are building on a rock and our house will survive. If we do not build on Christ and his words, we are building on sand and it will not survive.

In 1 Corinthians 3:10-15, Paul expands on this CONSTRUCTION imagery... he goes beyond the foundation that is laid to the actual day to day construction of everything that goes into that house. What we are building will either be of high quality materials – gold, silver, costly stones – or it will be of low quality materials – wood, hay, straw.

This is one of the most famous paragraphs in 1 Corinthians, and it stands as a continual warning and exhortation to me to be faithful as a pastor to build FBC with excellent materials... the pure word of God faithful taught and lived out. It also stands over all Christians to warn us to make the most of every single day, for our days will be tested with fire to prove their quality.

I. Paul Laid the Foundation; Others Build Upon It

A. How Paul Laid a Foundation in Corinth

1. Paul laid the foundation

1 Corinthians 3:10 By the grace God has given me, I laid a foundation as an expert builder

2. Paul makes it plain that the only true foundation is Jesus Christ

1 Corinthians 3:11 For no one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ.

3. He asserts plainly that the foundation was ALREADY LAID

John 19:30 When he had received the drink, Jesus said, "It is finished." With that, he bowed his head and gave up his spirit.

Hebrews 1:3 After he had provided purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty in heaven.

a. There is nothing that Paul could do to add to or take away from the perfect work of Christ on the cross

b. That is the sure, immovable foundation for the church of Jesus Christ

4. However, when Christ suffered and died for his people, he did so one afternoon outside the city gates of Jerusalem... in Judea; the people of Corinth had heard NOTHING about it at all

5. The Apostle Paul was sent on mission from God to lay the foundation of Christ's finished work on the cross IN THE MINDS and HEARTS of the Corinthian people

6. He did this by preaching the gospel plainly and clearly, in the power of the Holy Spirit

1 Corinthians 2:2 I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and him crucified.

7. The preaching of Christ in the power of the Spirit resulted in the conversion of many Corinthians to faith in Christ... they were CALLED by the Spirit out of the world into the church of Jesus Christ

8. This was the foundation that Paul laid... clear preaching of the cross of Jesus Christ; clear call to the Corinthians to renounce their sins and trust in Christ

9. This was the beginning of the church of Jesus Christ... this is the foundation that Paul laid

B. No Other Foundation Can Be Laid

1. This is the only foundation that will survive the shaking of the earth, the judgment of the world
2. No other foundation will survive this MASSIVE earthquake that is coming on all the earth

Hebrews 12:26 now he has promised, "Once more I will shake not only the earth but also the heavens."

Revelation 6:12-17 I watched as he opened the sixth seal. There was a great earthquake. The sun turned black like sackcloth made of goat hair, the whole moon turned blood red, ¹³ and the stars in the sky fell to earth, as late figs drop from a fig tree when shaken by a strong wind. ¹⁴ The sky receded like a scroll, rolling up, and every mountain and island was removed from its place. ¹⁵ Then the kings of the earth, the princes, the generals, the rich, the mighty, and every slave and every free man hid in caves and among the rocks of the mountains. ¹⁶ They called to the mountains and the rocks, "Fall on us and hide us from the face of him who sits on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb! ¹⁷ For the great day of their wrath has come, and who can stand?"

3. Any other foundation is another gospel...

Galatians 1:8 even if we or an angel from heaven should preach a gospel other than the one we preached to you, let him be eternally condemned!

C. By the Grace God Gave Him

1. Paul's role in laying the foundation of the church in Corinth was SHEER GRACE to him... only by the grace of God was he rescued from being an enemy of the church

1 Corinthians 15:9-10 I am the least of the apostles and do not even deserve to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. ¹⁰ But by the grace of God I am what I am

2. Paul established that he and Apollos were merely servants... only by God's grace

1 Corinthians 3:5-7 What, after all, is Apollos? And what is Paul? Only servants, through whom you came to believe-- as the Lord has assigned to each his task. ⁶ I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God made it grow. ⁷ So neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God, who makes things grow.

D. Paul Calls Himself "A Wise Master Builder"

1 Corinthians 3:10 According to the grace of God given to me, like a skilled master builder I laid a foundation

1. The word "skilled" = wise
2. Paul is carrying on his ministry in a very WISE way, understanding God's will and what Christ came to do
3. He also calls himself a "master builder"... literally "architecton", ruler-builder

- a. The seasoned expert builder who runs the worksite... the one who hires the subcontractors and tells them when to come and what to do
 - b. The one with the clear understanding of the blueprints, the overall plans for the building
4. So Paul knew what was involved in building a healthy local church in Corinth... addressing leadership issues (establishing elders in every town, selecting deacons, setting up discipleship patterns, establishing the proper observance of the ordinances, dealing with church discipline, counseling toward healthy marriages and families, etc.)
 5. Paul stayed in Corinth for a long time, getting everything in order
 6. BUT THEN... he left

E. Others Now Building on His Foundation

1 Corinthians 3:10 ... I laid a foundation as an expert builder, and someone else is building on it.

1. Apollos came later... as we've said, described as powerful in speech, extremely knowledgeable in the scriptures, able to refute opponents by powerful arguments
2. The warning Paul is about to give is not meant to be a slight to Apollos... actually, Paul speaks very well of Apollos here
3. I believe this warning is for ANY and ALL who follow him in the work of the Lord... and that includes US

II. Paul's Warning: Be Careful How You Build

1 Corinthians 3:10 But each one should be careful how he builds.

A. This is a very SOBER Warning for us all!

1. 2 Corinthians speaks of some teachers that came to Corinth after Paul ... false teachers who looked like Christian apostles
2. They abused the Corinthians with their arrogance and their domineering use of authority
3. Worse, they taught false doctrine that was extremely plausible... they looked and sounded good, but they were false teachers

2 Corinthians 11:13-15 For such men are false apostles, deceitful workmen, masquerading as apostles of Christ. ¹⁴ And no wonder, for Satan himself masquerades as an angel of light. ¹⁵ It is not surprising, then, if his servants masquerade as servants of righteousness. Their end will be what their actions deserve.

- ##### B. However, in 1 Corinthians 3, Paul is speaking much more of SHODDY workmanship rather than false teaching
1. The way we build will be tested, and some of our words and works may end up being consumed in the fire

2. He speaks of people themselves being saved, but only as those escaping through the flames...(We'll discuss that more in a moment)
3. But clearly he is speaking here about genuine Christians who any kind of work at all in building the church of Christ

C. Four Criteria for Excellent Workmanship in the Church of Christ

Method Materials Manner Motive

1. Method: "let each one be careful HOW he builds"... trusting the Word of God taught in the power of the Holy Spirit to do the work
 1. Laying foundation: God has ordained one main method: the foolishness of gospel preaching (**Jesus Christ and Him crucified**)
 2. Building on the foundation: faithful teaching of the Word

2 Timothy 2:15 Study to show yourself approved unto God, a workman that does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.

4. Preaching & teaching systematically through verse after verse, book after book
 - Expository teaching lets the text speak for itself
 - NOT JUST the "Gospel"... move your hearers on to maturity

Acts 20:27 I have not hesitated to proclaim to you the whole will of God.

Some churches focus on personalities... powerful pulpiteers, or joke-telling, story-weaving entertainers; some focus on dynamic leadership style, high-level state of the art management seminars; other churches rely on modern architecture, track lighting, ergonomically designed pews, state of the art electronic multimedia displays, Powerpoint presentations, gimmicks like rotating pulpits in the center of the church... or even the latest outreach fad

None of this builds the church eternally...the timeless word of God alone does... Milk, then meat

2. Materials

1 Corinthians 3:12-13 If any man builds on this foundation using gold, silver, costly stones, wood, hay or straw, ¹³ 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.

- a. This refers to the quality of both your life and your doctrine
- b. Every moment of our lives is either eternally worthy or eternally worthless
- c. Since the work is to be tested with fire, and since gold, silver, and costly stones all survive the fire, and since wood, hay, and straw do not survive the fire, it must be

that these higher quality materials are those things that God has COMMANDED us to do in the Christian life... things of the highest quality

- d. These have varying worth... gold is worth more than silver, diamonds are worth more than gold... good, better, best
- e. So, this refers to choosing to MAKE THE MOST out of every moment of your life on earth, doing things that will build the church of Christ—spiritual gift ministries, works of mercy to the poor and needy, money given to spread the gospel, words of encouragement spoken to

3. Manner

- a. Paul will make it clear later that right doctrine is not enough; all the spiritual gifts operating fully is not enough
- b. Everything must be done IN A LOVING MANNER

1 Corinthians 8:1 “Knowledge puffs up, but love builds up.”

1 Corinthians 13:1-5 If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal. ² If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. ³ If I give all I possess to the poor and surrender my body to the flames, but have not love, I gain nothing. ⁴ Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. ⁵ It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs.

- c. The right actions done with the wrong attitude will result in no reward from God on Judgment Day

4. Motive

1 Corinthians 10:31 So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God.

III. Judgment Day Testing: What Will Remain of Your Lifework?

Look again at the amazing words Paul gives, showing us what Judgment Day will entail

1 Corinthians 3:12-15 If any man builds on this foundation using gold, silver, costly stones, wood, hay or straw, ¹³ 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. ¹⁴ If what he has built survives, he will receive his reward. ¹⁵ If it is burned up, he will suffer loss; he himself will be saved, but only as one escaping through the flames.

A. The Present Quality of the Work is Hidden from our Eyes

- 1. Something may look really good on the outside, but God knows it is corrupt on the inside
- 2. JUDGMENT DAY is coming, in which all secrets will be revealed, and the true nature of every work and word will be made clear

- a. He says “the Day will bring it to light” or “disclose it”
 - b. That Day is clearly Judgment Day
3. Remember what George Whitefield, the great evangelist of the 18th century, wanted on his tomb:

“Here lies George Whitefield; what kind of man he was the Great Day will discover.”

B. Revealed With Fire, and the Fire Will Test the Quality of Each Person’s Work

- 1. There is a clear warning here, as well as a promise
- 2. Our works, ALL OF THEM, will be evaluated by the fire of God’s holy judgment
- 3. The gold, silver, costly stones will remain beyond the testing, and will actually be PURIFIED by the testing... that will be the basis of our eternal rewards for our service
- 4. The wood, hay, straw will burn up...
 - a. In context here, all SHODDY WORKMANSHIP in the ministry of the word will BURN UP

Pastors who rely on gimmicks like those we mentioned... or pastors who do not handle the word accurately; listen again

2 Timothy 2:15 Study to show yourself approved unto God, a workman that does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.

The word “ashamed” really is consummated on Judgment Day, in which pastors and teachers of the word will be JUDGED MORE SEVERELY than everyone else

However, it is not just pastors and church leaders whose works will be tested by fire... this passage refers to EVERYONE of Christ’s servants... we are ALL going to have to give an account for the works we did in our lives... and anything that is low quality, not eternally useful for building up the Body of Christ

- b. Sins will surely burn up... sins of commission, when you violated God’s Laws and your conscience... the fire will consume them all as completely unfit for reward... anything done in secret that you know is sinful... it will be exposed on Judgment Day, and then consumed by the righteous judgment of Christ
- c. But so also any of our sins. Specific example, our WORDS

Matthew 12:36 But I tell you that men will have to give account on the day of judgment for every careless word they have spoken.

Many of the words we speak are WORTHLESS... they are wood, hay, straw

Ephesians 4:29 Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen.

“Only what is helpful for BUILDING OTHERS UP...”; that’s construction language... did you use your words to strengthen the work of grace in someone else’s life, or to tear it down?

Arguments, words spoken in anger, prideful boasting, off-color jokes, gossip, slander, exaggerations, shading the truth, cutting remarks, put-downs... SO MANY WORDS that we have spoken will be consumed as wood, hay, and straw on that final day

d. So also worthless pursuits will burn up... worldly investments of time, energy, money... perhaps much of our discretionary time—the time spent watching Netflix or yet another sporting event; the time we spent oversleeping or pursuing shopping therapy; the time, energy, money we spent foolishly on ourselves and our pleasures... so much WOOD HAY and STRAW... I’m not saying EVERY TIME YOU WATCH SPORTS OR A MOVIE, it will burn up on Judgment Day... but the question you have to ask is, “Is this exactly what the Lord wants me to do with my time right now?”

e. If what we have built is CONSUMED, we will suffer LOSS

I have meditated much on that phrase... SUFFER LOSS... to see the works we have invested ourselves in be burned up in the fire will be a PAINFUL THING... it will hurt us to see the wasted resources of time, energy, money... that we didn’t redeem the time and use our spiritual gifts the best way we could have

What will it feel like to see much of our life, many of the things we chose to do with our time, many of the things we chose to buy with our money... BURN UP as worthless on Judgment Day?

There is a definite PAIN in these words, and it is wise for us to feel that pain acutely, to be warned in advance

The Apostle Paul warns us to “be careful how we build” Christ’s church... and how we live our lives

Don’t waste your life on WOOD, HAY, and STRAW

If you do, your works will go up in flames on Judgment Day

C. He Himself Will Be Saved, BUT...

1 Corinthians 3:15 If it is burned up, he will suffer loss; he himself will be saved, but only as one escaping through the flames.

1. There is a difference between the person and their works
2. This is speaking of a genuine Christian who suffers the loss of many of their works
3. If they have NO GOOD WORKS AT ALL, they are not Christians
4. But this person is finally saved... they have trusted in Christ alone and received the gift of forgiveness of sins

5. BUT they suffer the loss of so many of their works... most of their life is WASTED TIME

6. SAVED as “one escaping through the flames”

Like the owner of a clipper ship back in the days of sailing vessels... he invest all of his worldly wealth in a shipment of gold from the gold rush in California... he sails with his fast clipper ship around the straits of Magellan to bring his shipment back to New York... but there is a terrible storm and his ship is lost... but he manages to escape with his life by means of some wreckage...

So it will be for such a person who has invested his life in worldly wealth or earthly pursuits or sinful pastimes... he is saved by his faith in Christ, but he has almost nothing to show for his time on earth

D. The Basis for Eternal Rewards

1 Corinthians 3:14 If the work that anyone has built on the foundation survives, he will receive a reward.

1. The GOLD, SILVER, and COSTLY STONES will be purified by the fire and serve as the basis of our heavenly rewards

2. MORE NEXT TIME!!

IV. Applications

A. Evaluate your life and your works

1. First, test yourself to see if you are actually a Christian
2. By your works, you will be evaluated on Judgment Day
3. What do your works show about your heart?
4. Do you have a genuine faith in Christ? Does the Holy Spirit within you testify with your heart that you are a child of God?

B. If You Have Never Trusted in Christ Before... Come NOW!

C. If you ARE a Christian, evaluate how you have been building your life

1. Your basic foundation is Christ, but perhaps you have been building an ADDITION or BACK EXTENSION on sand...
2. Perhaps you have been pursuing worldly things, living for money or earthly pastimes and have been wasting your life
3. This is a wonderful time to REPENT of that kind of life... to SEEK FIRST CHRIST'S KINGDOM and HIS RIGHTEOUSNESS

4. Do you see a pattern of WOOD, HAY, STRAW in the choices you are making? How you are spending your time, your energy, your money, your talents?
5. Through this text, God is calling all of us to AWAKE, to SHAKE OFF OUR SLUMBER and start building wisely
6. Saturate your mind in the word of God every day... pray fervently; Say to Christ, “Lord, I don’t want to waste my life! I want to do the good works you have prepared in advance for me to walk in. Please forgive me for all the ways I’ve build with wood, hay, and straw over the last days, weeks, months... even years. Those days are gone, and there is nothing I can do about them now except to learn from them. But right here, right now, I want to start living for your Kingdom... your church... I want to start getting involved in outreach—in winning lost people to Christ. I want to start getting involved in discipleship—building up another person in Christ. I want to build TODAY with eternally valuable materials.”

D. Next week: How to maximize your heavenly rewards