

# Built to Last

## 1 Corinthians 3:9-23

If you want something to last it needs to be well made and taken care of. The church is no different. The way it is built determines the way it endures. Paul tells us how he built and why. We are what God is building, but also craftsmen on the project. We want to build to last.

### One Foundation

Paul and Apollos are God's workers, and the Corinthians are God's field and building (v9). God is the integration point of the whole project, so everyone should work in reference to Him (cf. Mk. 9:40). Paul calls himself an *architecton*, a wise master builder, but both his skill and success founding the church are by the grace of God (v10 cf. 4:7). His work goes deep and wide to bless and grow the church, and we are able to be equipped like he was by studying Scripture (2 Tim. 3:16-17). The result is humble confidence. He laid the only foundation that can be laid, Jesus Christ (vv10-11). Everything in the church should trace back to serving Jesus: the worship service, missions, mercy ministry, leadership structure, Bible studies, youth ministry, accounting, real estate, and administration. If the church exists and functions to do fundamentally anything else than glorify God, it's off mission and the foundation is cracked and crumbling. We don't exist to help the poor or serve families or uphold traditional values or bring racial reconciliation or even to love our neighbors. These things may be wonderful and important, but they're not the foundation. Jesus is cornerstone of the church. Get Him and you get everything. Miss Him and we have just another man-centered religion.

### Enduring Materials

A solid foundation is necessary, but no one lives on just a foundation. The house has to be built with lasting materials, so "let each one take heed how he builds on it" (v10). Every Christian is involved in the church and her mission. Whatever materials we use will become apparent over time because fire will test the work (v13). This is not the fire of purgatory because Scripture never teaches that purgatory exists, and it's the work not the person who is being refined. Notice that Paul doesn't indicate that some work will go unnoticed and escape fire. All of it will get tested sooner or later, just as Jesus and the disciples did. Cheap materials are fast and easy to come by, but they are flammable. Like the seed that sprouts quickly because it has no foundation, building with hay and straw doesn't take much heavy lifting. The walls go up right away, and can come down just as easily. We are not saved by building the church effectively. The one who doesn't still survives, but his work burns (v15). Precious materials require time and care. Peter tells us that Christians are living stones being built up into a spiritual house (1 Pet. 2:4-5). Becoming a mature Christian takes time, and churches that teach the whole counsel of God will have a lasting impact in the world. Those who serve this way will receive a reward (v14). Certainly part of the reward is just doing and enjoying the work (Ps. 84:10). But he

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who is faithful with a little will have the opportunity to be faithful with much. God tells us to serve Him with these things in mind (cf. Rom. 2:7).

### **Spirit-filled**

Paul asks the first of ten rhetorical questions to point out what the Corinthians know and should be living by: “Don’t you know that you are the temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you?” (v16). The temple was God’s house, and when His glory cloud filled it the priests had to flee (1 Kgs. 8:11). Before Jesus came, the glory and holiness of God was too dangerous for sinners, and so the temple was regulated in order to keep people safe. But now that we’ve seen the glory of God in face of Jesus Christ and have been reconciled to God through His blood, we come to God, and incredibly He comes to dwell in us, by the Spirit. The church is Spirit-filled. God is still Holy and dangerous, so anyone who attacks His people will suffer (v17). This is why the church has survived and thrived through persecution, while movements and regimes that have attacked have withered. The church is built to last because she is the work of the Holy Spirit. Paul returns and concludes his thoughts on wisdom and foolishness begun in 1:18. God makes fools out of people who think they’re worldly wise so don’t be deceived (vv18-19). And don’t boast in men (v21). Everything is yours—the truth, world, life, death, the present and the future. This is because we are Christ’s and Christ is God’s (vv22-23). You can’t miss what’s yours. And whatever good thing you want you have. We work in the temple, as the temple, on the temple with access to everything God has. There is nothing that He withholds from us; it’s only a matter of time and maturity.