

March 11, 2018
I Corinthians 3:10-17

“The Body of Christ (8): God’s Temple”

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Vs.16 and the very end of vs.17 of our text says this: **“Don’t you know that you yourselves are God’s temple and that God’s Spirit lives in you? ... for God’s temple is sacred (or holy), and you are that temple.”** Isn’t that astounding? Every believer in Jesus is a temple of the Holy Spirit. The invisible church as a whole, made up of believers in Jesus Christ, is a temple God. **By God’s grace we are that temple. The only foundation of that Temple is the Lord Jesus Christ. Since Jesus is our foundation we should only build our lives with excellence.**

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A year or two ago I came across this Youtube post that talked about this temple that they’ve built in Brazil. Have you heard about this? It was built by “The Universal Church of the Kingdom of God”. It is an exact replica of Solomon’s temple of the Old Testament—only this one is four times bigger! It was completed in 2014. It seats 10 000 worshippers. At its highest point it’s the height of an 18 story building. There’s a conveyer belt system designed to carry tithes and offerings from the altar directly into a safe room. It has a helicopter pad. The main altar in the church has a replica of the Old Testament Ark of the Covenant. The entire central altar is covered in gold leaf. The whole project cost \$300 million to construct— 50% more than initial estimates. And \$8

million worth of Jerusalem stone were imported to Brazil from Israel to cover the central pillars of the temple entrance and the center aisle. And I'm here to say, *We need to build the same thing here in Parry Sound!!!*

... of course, ... we don't ... why? ... Because God's already got a temple here in Parry Sound. In fact, He's got *many* temples here in Parry Sound. But they're not built with steel, concrete and stone. They're comprised of human hearts and lives who know, honor, lift up and live for Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord. For God's Word here in I Corinthians 3:16-17 says, *Don't you know that you yourselves are God's temple and that God's Spirit lives in you? ... for God's temple is sacred, and you are that temple.*

Show slide 3

First of all, by God's grace alone we are that temple. In vs.10 Paul writes, **"By the grace God has given me, I laid a foundation as an expert builder, and someone else is building on it."** Paul's talking about the church here—not a literal building—but the people. By "expert builder" he means that he is like the superintendent of the work—overseeing many subcontractors to do the work. But notice what he says there at the beginning of vs.10. He says, **"By the grace God has given me, I laid a foundation"** Throughout Paul's inspired writings in the New Testament, the Apostle Paul himself was very, very conscious that he was only in the position he was in by the grace of God—that free gift of God, that unmerited, unearned favor.

In a memorable moment in chapter 15 he writes, **"For I am least of the apostles and do not even deserve to be called an apostle because I persecuted the church of God. But by the grace of God I am what I am, and His grace to me was not without**

effect. No, I worked harder than all of them—yet not I, but the grace of God that was with me.” (I Cor. 15:9-10)

Not even the great Apostle Paul based his acceptance on his own merits. Instead, he based his relationship, his acceptance with God on the grace of God. *It is by God's grace alone that we are God's temple.* Not through anything we've done. Not through anything we could have done.

I remember when I was first starting out in ministry, I did not start well. In fact, during the very first year of my ordained ministry I suffered a fairly deep depression. And at the end of that first year Miriam and I took ourselves and the kids up to what is now Muskoka Bible Conference. And for the entire week we were up there, every day, the speaker did a series from the New Testament on the grace of God. And over and over and over again throughout that series of messages, he repeated this one line: *Your worst days are never so bad as to be beyond the reach of God's grace. And your best days are never so good as to be beyond the need of God's grace.*

Isn't that good! Your worst days! Your halitosis is so bad it knocks the dog out. You get up out of bed and stub your toe. You show up late for work. Once you get there, you learn it's Saturday and you're not supposed to be in anyways! Your worst days! You're fed up, messed up, and laid up. *Still ... it's never so bad that you're beyond the grace of God.* And your best days! You're served breakfast in bed. The dog takes himself out for a walk. You face the day with a hop in your step. Your long lost uncle's left you with millions. You're at the top of your game. *Still ... it's never so good that you're beyond the need of God's grace.*

By God's grace, and by God's grace alone, we are that temple. Max Lucado writes, "God's grace has a drenching about it. A wildness about it. A white-water, riptide, turn-you-upside-downness about it. Grace comes after you. It rewires you. From insecure to God secure. From regret-riddled to better-because-of-it. From afraid-to-die to ready-to-fly. Grace is the voice that calls us to change and then gives us the power to pull it off. When grace happens, we receive not a nice compliment from God but a new heart." (M. Lucado, *Grace ...*, pg.8)

In life, as well as in ministry, I don't do well when I forget about the grace of God. But when I remember the grace of God ... I do well ... we all do well ... it's ironic, but when and as we learn it's all about His grace and it's not about us ... we begin to do well. *By God's grace we are that temple.*

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But the only foundation of that temple is the Lord Jesus Christ. Vs.12: **"For no one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is the Lord Jesus Christ."** Isn't that an amazing statement? There's an old hymn that states, "The church's one foundation is Jesus Christ her Lord." But Paul's saying something even more radical than that. He isn't just saying that the Lord Jesus is the church's one foundation—he's saying that the Lord Jesus Christ is the only foundation there is! There is no other!

Suppose, just for fun, I start building a house. And those who know me say, *Yeah, right. You building a house, that really IS funny!* But suppose I start a building project and I invite you over to inspect my foundation... and it's this clear, bright red

substance that I've somehow molded to make a foundation. And you say, *Chris, what is that red stuff you have on top of those footings?* And I reply, *That's raspberry jello! I've made raspberry jello the foundation of my new house ... mmmmm ... I LOVE raspberry jello!* You'd say, *Chris, that's just mush! That's not even a foundation at all!*

That's tantamount to what Paul is saying here! By saying, ***For no one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is the Lord Jesus Christ***, what he's really insinuating is that *any foundation other than Christ Himself is really no foundation at all*. It's just mush. However good your foundation is ... be it your good works, or your reputation or your competency and skill, be it a financial foundation, even your family—as right and good as all these things may well be—they're all no foundation. ***For no one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is the Lord Jesus Christ.***

A few moments ago we were talking very glowingly of God's grace. But, you see, Jesus, Who He is and what He accomplished for you and for me, is the very *foundation* even of God's grace. God's grace can only enliven us, heal us, redeem us, and restore us to God *through* what God did for us in and through Jesus dying on the Cross and being raised again three days later. *That work*, and that work *alone* is the very basis for any real relationship with God. That's the only foundation that matters.

My hope is built on nothing less Than Jesus' blood and righteousness; I dare not trust the sweetest frame, But wholly lean on Jesus' Name. On Christ, the solid rock, I stand; All other ground is sinking sand, All other ground is sinking sand.

We're going to sing that in just a few moments... and it's true ... the basis of our lives, our very foundation, can't be based on anything other than Jesus. It's built on nothing

less than His blood and righteousness. I John 1:7 tells us that the blood of Jesus purifies us from all sin. Romans 3:22 tells us that the righteousness from God comes through Jesus Christ to all who believe. In other words, we believe in Jesus. We trust wholeheartedly that He died and rose again for us. And His righteousness becomes ours. His blood purifies us from all sin. God actually views us as righteous, as completely justified *through Jesus*. So much so that Romans 8:1 tells us that there is now *no condemnation* for those who are in Christ Jesus. He *is* our foundation. And His is the only foundation that counts.

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But then, notice finally, *because* our foundation is the Lord Jesus Himself, *we should only build our lives with EXCELLENCE*. Paul goes on to write in vs.12, **“If anyone builds on this foundation using gold, silver, costly stones, wood, hay or straw, their 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 person’s work. If what has been built survives, the builder will receive a reward. If it is burned up, the builder will suffer loss but yet will be saved—even though only as one escaping through the flames.”**

Whoa, now, wait a minute, someone might say, you just spent a whole lot of time explaining that we’re saved by grace and not by our own works. But it looks as if we might be saved by works after all. To which I say, not so fast! Vs.15 tells us that if one person’s work is burned up, the person themselves will be saved, only if its as one escaping through the flames. So it’s not salvation we’re talking about here as it is

testing. The Bible clearly, clearly teaches that we are only saved by grace alone. But that doesn't mean we won't be judged! That doesn't mean that our work won't be tested! We will! And it will! If you want to research into this further, I'd simply point you to Jesus' parable of the talents in Matthew 25:14-30 or a similar parable He tells in Luke 19:11-27—in both cases the Bible clearly teaches that we *will* be judged *by what we do with what we are given*.

So I Corinthians 3:12-15 is really talking about *those who are already saved*. And vs.12 of our passage talks about building our lives on the foundation that is Jesus, using six kinds of building materials, either **“gold, silver, costly stones, wood, hay or straw”**. Now, there have been umpteen interpretations of what each of these building materials represent. But we have to remember that Paul is writing to the folks in Corinth. And Corinth was a town that had *a lot* of temples. And back in Paul's day, during ancient times, temples were often inlaid and adorned with gold and silver, and were often constructed with marble or other “costly stones”. Whereas, on the other hand, ordinary houses were built with wood and bricks mixed with hay or straw. So, on the one hand, we have fancy, high quality, lavish temples adorned with gold, silver and costly constructions stones like marble. And on the other hand, we have just plain old ordinary homes made with wood, and bricks mixed with hay or straw.

So instead of six groups, there's probably just two groups—you can either use gold, silver or costly stones, *OR* you can use wood, hay or straw. What's it going to be? The individual Christian and the church as a whole is God's temple. Our foundation is the Lord Jesus Christ Himself. It's either Him or nothing. There is no other foundation. And if our foundation is Jesus Himself, are we going to build to last, using gold, silver or

costly stones? Or, are we going to just settle for plain old wood, hay or straw? Another way of putting it is, *It's all for Jesus. He's our Only Foundation. Are we going to strive for excellence for Him, ... or are we just gonna mail it in?* Remember! If we've placed our trust in Jesus we're saved already! Your salvation and mine is *not at stake!* *But what IS at stake is the LASTING NATURE of the LIVES, THE LEGACY we're building for Him!*

Look with me again at vs.13-15: **"...their 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 person's work. If what has been built survives, the builder will receive a reward. If it is burned up, the builder will suffer loss but yet will be saved—even though only as one escaping through the flames."** Again, salvation isn't on the table here! And yet, these are sobering, sobering words indeed! A Day is coming, Paul is saying, the Day of the Lord, the Day of judgment. The Day will come with fire! In Luke 19:28-30 Jesus Himself said, **"It was the same in the days of Lot. People were eating and drinking, buying and selling, planting and building. But the day Lot left Sodom, fire and sulfur rained down from heaven and destroyed them all. It will be just like this on the day the Son of Man is revealed."** And in our text Paul says that fire itself will test the quality of each one's work—if it's done with excellence, with gold, silver or precious stones, it'll survive. But if it's just made with plain ol' wood, hay or straw, it'll burn. And then vs.15 tells us, the builder themselves will be saved—but only as one snatched from the flames!

So the question becomes for the individual Christian, *Are you and I going to go for excellence? Or are we just going to coast?* That work in Sao Paulo Brazil is a

precious work, isn't it? \$300 million worth. But do you know what's *an even more* precious work? YOU are A FAR, FAR MORE PRECIOUS WORK in the eyes of God. What we do for Jesus on this planet COUNTS! IT MATTERS—A LOT!! One fateful day God is going to test what we did for the glory of Jesus—our Great Foundation. God is going to test and see if we offered our very, very best for Him—using gold, silver & precious stones, or if we just got by with wood, hay and straw.

In his wonderful book, *Every Good Endeavor*, Timothy Keller retells a short story originally written by J.R.R. Tolkien called, “Leaf By Niggle”. Now, I’m sure many of you know that Tolkien is known as the author of the great Lord of the Rings books. But what you may not know is that in the process of creating those stories, after decades of developing languages and histories to give his story depth and reality, at about the age of 50, just as World War II was about to erupt, Tolkien reached an impasse—he got writer’s block.

And in the midst of this crisis a short story came to him. About an artist named Niggle. And Niggle was famous for, well, niggling—not getting on too well with important things. Niggle was enamored with this great tree outside his house, that had been surreptitiously cut down and destroyed by a neighbor. So Niggle decided to create one last, great master piece of his life. He decided to capture a tree on canvas—a canvas so large he’d need a ladder to get to the top of it—his vision all started out with a single leaf, then branched out to include the whole tree, and behind that tree “a country began to open out; and there were glimpses of a forest marching over the land, and of mountains tipped with snow.”

But Niggle also knew that he had to die one day. But still, he told himself, “At any rate, I shall get this one picture done, my real picture, before I have to go on that wretched journey.”

So he worked and worked ... but didn't get a lot done. He lived up to his name. He niggled. There were two reasons for this. One was that he was far, far better at painting leaves than trees, so he used to spend an inordinate amount of time on one leaf—trying to get the shadow and the sheen and the dewdrops just right. The other reason was that Niggle “had a kind heart”. So he was constantly distracted by doing things his neighbors asked him to do—especially one neighbor named Parish, who didn't appreciate his painting at all, was constantly asking Niggle to do things for him.

Until, one night, Parish insists that Niggle go out into the wet and cold to get a doctor for his sick wife. And as a result, Niggle himself comes down with a fever, and he is asked to take that terrible journey he had so dreaded taking. Some time after his death a fragment of that one brilliant leaf he painted got discovered and was put in the Town Museum to be noticed by some.

But the story doesn't end there. As the story goes, after death Niggle is put on a train towards the mountains of the heavenly afterlife. And at one point he hears two Voices: One seems to be Justice, a severe voice, which said that Niggle accomplished so little and wasted so much time in life. But the other Voice, a gentler One, (“though it was not soft”), seemed to be Mercy, which said that since Niggle had chosen to sacrifice for others, knowing what he was doing, that there was a reward waiting for him.

As Niggle gets to the outskirts of the heavenly country, he runs into it, and there it is: “Before him stood the Tree, his Tree, finished; its leaves opening, its branches

growing and bending in the wind Niggle had so often felt or guessed, and yet had failed to catch. He gazed at the Tree, and slowly he lifted his arms and opened them wide. ‘It is a gift!’ he said.”

And in commenting on all of this Timothy Keller writes, “If this life is all there is, then everything will eventually burn up in the death of the sun and no one will even be around to remember anything that has ever happened. Everyone will be forgotten, nothing we do will make any difference, and all good endeavors, even the best, will come to naught. ... Unless there is God. If the God of the Bible exists, and there is a True Reality beneath and behind this one, and this life is not the only life, then every good endeavor, even the simplest ones, pursued in response to God’s calling, can matter forever. That is what the Christian faith promises.” (T. Keller, *Every Good Endeavor*, pg.9-14)

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If you are a believer in Jesus, then ***by God’s grace we are that temple. The only foundation of that Temple is the Lord Jesus Christ. Since Jesus is our foundation we should only build our lives with excellence.***