

## SCRIPTURE LESSON TEXT

**I COR. 3:10** According to the grace of God which is given unto me, as a wise masterbuilder, I have laid the foundation, and another buildeth thereon. But let every man take heed how he buildeth thereupon.

**11 For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ.**

12 Now if any man build upon this foundation gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, stubble;

**13 Every man's work shall be made manifest: for the day shall declare it, because it shall be revealed by fire; and the fire shall try every man's work of what sort it is.**

14 If any man's work abide which he hath built thereupon, he shall receive a reward.

**15 If any man's work shall be burned, he shall suffer loss: but he himself shall be saved; yet so as by fire.**

16 Know ye not that ye are the

temple of God, and *that* the Spirit of God dwelleth in you?

**17 If any man defile the temple of God, him shall God destroy; for the temple of God is holy, which temple ye are.**

18 Let no man deceive himself. If any man among you seemeth to be wise in this world, let him become a fool, that he may be wise.

**19 For the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God. For it is written, He taketh the wise in their own craftiness.**

20 And again, The Lord knoweth the thoughts of the wise, that they are vain.

**21 Therefore let no man glory in men. For all things are yours;**

22 Whether Paul, or Apollos, or Cephas, or the world, or life, or death, or things present, or things to come; all are yours;

**23 And ye are Christ's; and Christ is God's.**

### NOTES

# Christ—Our Only Foundation

Lesson Text: I Corinthians 3:10-23

Related Scriptures: I Corinthians 3:1-9; Ephesians 2:19-22

TIME: A.D. 55

PLACE: from Ephesus

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**GOLDEN TEXT**—“For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ” (I Corinthians 3:11).

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## *Lesson Exposition*

### **THE FOUNDATION OF THE CHURCH I Cor. 3:10-15**

**The foundation for the church (I Cor. 3:10-11).** The purpose of this week’s lesson is to show that the foundation of the church is Jesus Christ. Everything we believe and live according to begins and ends with Him. When the winds of trials and tribulations blow against us, we know we can stand firm because our foundation is strong and immovable. It should bring us great joy to know that our lives are built on the foundation of Christ.

When construction on a building begins, only one foundation is laid. There is no need for multiple foundations, and the mere thought of this is foolish. The entire structure is built on one foundation, and the foundation Paul is speaking of is Jesus Christ. We as Christians have no other foundation than Christ, and He is the one the church is built on.

**The foundation for good works (I Cor. 3:12-13).** Now that the foundation has been laid, it is time to build on it. Christ our Foundation has given His life on the cross and has been raised from the dead. These facts are essential to all Christian doctrine and

practice. The foundation can only be laid one time, and there is only one. All of our current and future work is to be conducted on the finished work of Jesus and His resurrection.

The strength and beauty of any structure depends on the quality of building materials. There is only one foundation, but many materials are used in construction. Some materials are better than others, and some will therefore stand the test of time better than others. Paul uses some examples of imperishable and perishable materials to show us the need for diligence in Christian works. His examples of imperishable materials are gold, silver, and precious stones. These items are costly and call for skill and patience in their use.

Perishable materials are cheaper and generally require less care. Paul uses wood, hay, and straw as examples. How sad it is to have such a beautiful foundation only to use shoddy materials to build on it.

“The day” refers to the day when the fire of judgment will be applied to each of our works. This will not be the final Day of Judgment in store for unbelievers, but a thorough assessment of believers’ works in this life. Gold, silver,

and precious stones will survive the fire, but the wood, hay, and straw will be consumed, leaving the builder with nothing to show for the work he has done.

**The foundation for rewards (I Cor. 3:14-15).** Those whose work survives the fire of judgment will be rewarded for their service. One thing is for sure: our foundation is eternal and is unaffected by fire. Our work, however, is subject to the fire and open to judgment. Those who take the time to use imperishable materials will receive a reward. They took time to serve God with all their hearts, regardless of the trials and persecutions that resulted from it.

Those who use perishable materials are immature, stagnant believers who serve themselves and not Christ. They have faith in Him and are saved, but they show little devotion to Him in their daily lives. Those who use perishable materials will be saved “so as by fire” because of their faith in Jesus, but they will have little to no reward for their service.

### **THE TEMPLE OF GOD— I Cor. 3:16-17**

**God’s new temple (I Cor. 3:16).** The temple still stood in Jerusalem when Paul wrote I Corinthians in A.D. 55 and was not destroyed until A.D. 70, fifteen years later. It was still the most impressive physical structure in Israel and very important to the worship life of God’s chosen people. It had always been the place where God’s presence resided on earth.

The nature of the temple changed, however, after the death and resurrection of Jesus. On the Day of Pentecost, the Holy Spirit filled the believers who were gathered in the upper room. This was a fulfillment of Christ’s promise to send the Holy Spirit to His followers (John 16:7; Acts 1:8). Because the Holy Spirit lives inside each believer, the New Testament temple is not a building, but the living church.

**God’s precious temple (I Cor. 3:17).** The temple was where the presence of God resided in the Old Testament. In the New Testament era, which we still live in today, the Spirit of God no longer resides in a building. The Spirit of God resides in those who believe in Jesus Christ, and they together are the church.

Paul issues a stern warning to anyone who would bring harm to God’s temple. Those who do so will be destroyed by God. God’s temple, which is His people, is sacred to Him. No matter what happens in this life, justice is sure.

### **THE STRENGTH OF WISDOM— I Cor. 3:18-23**

**False wisdom (I Cor. 3:18).** No one likes to think of himself as foolish or ignorant. We tend to view ourselves as reasonably intelligent people with relevant opinions. Many even like to be innovative in their thoughts, feeling they have come upon new information or have a new way to look at old ideas. And God made us to be creative, so this is not necessarily bad.

When people think more highly of their own opinions than they do of God’s Word, however, they are deceived into moving away from biblical truth, which is deemed old-fashioned and irrelevant by the world at large. It would be much better to actually become a fool in order to find true wisdom.

**Foolishness in God’s eyes (I Cor. 3:19-20).** There needs to be a recommitment to teaching, believing, and obeying what Scripture has always taught. Keep in mind that the world will mock those who stand on Scripture because the Word of God is foolishness to the world. It makes no sense to them. However, the wisdom of the world is foolishness to God, so no matter what you believe, someone is going to consider you a fool. The question is, Who do you want to be called a fool by—the world or God?

While the world thinks that faith in

God is silly and pointless and that science has replaced God in our thoughts and actions, it is important to remember that no one can fool God. Scientists, philosophers, liberal theologians, and government leaders have come and gone, but God's Word remains, and it alone has stood the test of time. Paul states very clearly that the wisdom of the world is foolishness to God.

Paul quotes two Old Testament texts to support his contention that God reigns supreme over the thoughts and opinions of man. First, God catches the worldly-wise in their craftiness (Job 5:13). The Lord exposes their wicked schemes and will bring judgment on those who rebel against His Word. Second, God knows that the wisdom of the world is vain, or empty (Ps. 94:11).

**The source of true wisdom (I Cor. 3:21-23).** {Since God considers the wisdom of the world to be foolish, it is a terrible idea to boast in men before God.} <sup>Q10</sup> After all, if the world's thinking is foolishness, then what reason is there to boast in it?

This points back to Paul's previous command not to boast in the presence of the Lord, and that if we do boast, to boast in the Lord (1:29-31). This is also why the church should not divide over their favorite leaders or preachers. Neither Paul, Apollos, Peter, nor anyone else held a special key to truth that the others did not. We should all be preaching the same truth, built upon the same foundation: that it is Jesus Christ who delivers people from their bondage to sin.

There is only one gospel, but many who proclaim it. We receive Christ because we trust in Him to forgive us of our sins, give us His righteousness, and lead us to follow Him. This can only be done because of the power of the cross and the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit in our lives (cf. 1:18, 24).

Our salvation is not dependent on

who proclaimed the gospel to us. I do not even remember the name of the evangelist who preached the sermon the night that I got saved as a ten-year-old boy at church camp. It was a sermon based on fear tactics, but that is not why I went forward to accept Christ. I went because the Holy Spirit convicted me of my sin and convinced me of my need for Jesus Christ.

The teachings I had heard all my life from my parents, my pastor, and my Sunday school teachers rang true at that moment. No one gets credit for that except the Lord, and I am so thankful that He accepted me long before I accepted Him.

Since our salvation is not dependent on who taught us the gospel, we should never boast in men.

—Robert Ferguson, Jr.

## QUESTIONS

1. According to Paul, on what foundation is everything built?
2. How many foundations are there, and is there room for competition?
3. What are gold, silver, and precious stones examples of?
4. What are wood, hay, and straw examples of?
5. What will be applied to each person's work?
6. What will happen to those whose works survive God's judgment?
7. What will happen to those who used perishable materials?
8. What is the New Testament temple of God?
9. How do people deceive themselves in their own wisdom?
10. Why is it a terrible idea to boast in men before God?

—Robert Ferguson, Jr.

## PRACTICAL POINTS

1. Jesus Christ is the only foundation for all we teach and do (I Cor. 3:10-11).
2. Our churches, our homes, and our lives must be built on Jesus Christ alone to last (vss. 12-15).
3. God protects the church from those who would defile it, for it is His holy temple (vss. 16-17).
4. Faithfulness to God's Word seems foolish to those who do not believe (vss. 18-20).
5. Believers may honor leaders for their service, but worship belongs to God alone (vss. 21-22).
6. Unity in God's kingdom is only possible through Christ (vs. 23).

—Cheryl Y. Powell.

## RESEARCH AND DISCUSSION

1. What happens when the church is built on a foundation other than Christ? What are some of those other foundations? What steps can be taken to avoid such errors?
2. What rewards might a believer who is faithful in service to Christ expect to receive? Discuss.
3. What external and internal factors threaten the unity of churches? Why is it so important to protect unity in our churches? What could you do to strengthen the unity of your local church?
4. Why might it be tempting for believers to glory or boast in human leaders? Discuss.

—Cheryl Y. Powell.

## Golden Text Illuminated

**“For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ” (I Corinthians 3:11).**

The Corinthian church was building a shoddy edifice. Embroiled in debates and divisions, exalting themselves above one another, and casting a blind eye to sin, they were raising a shaky structure of wood, hay, and straw (cf. I Cor. 3:12).

Paul reminded the church that a true foundation already existed. That foundation was none other than Jesus Christ.

The psalmist also foresaw this divine foundation when he wrote, “The stone which the builders refused is become the head stone of the corner” (Ps. 118:22).

In ancient construction, the cornerstone was the largest and strongest in a foundation. It was always set first and carefully positioned, since it would determine the integrity of the entire structure. If the cornerstone was placed incorrectly, all the other stones would be out of alignment; if it was weak, the adjoining walls would collapse.

The Corinthians had not rejected Christ outright, but they were building carelessly, ignoring Christ as the foundation that had been laid for them. They were raising their church on a foundation of sin, not on the foundation of the “apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone” (Eph. 2:20). As a result, if they did not repent, their church was doomed to fail. Only by heeding God's wisdom in the gospel could they begin building with gold, silver, and precious stones (cf. I Cor. 3:12).

—Mark Winters.