

A large, multi-story building is under construction. The structure is made of concrete and steel, with many levels visible. A tall yellow crane stands on the left side of the building. The building is surrounded by scaffolding and construction equipment. The background shows a clear sky and some greenery.

The House of God:

The workmen's part in God's building

1 Corinthians 3:9-17

# The House of God:

## The workmen's part in God's building

So far in our sessions we have seen that Christ is building His church. We have seen God's side of building, everything there is perfect.

But there is also an aspect of man's responsibility in building that we find in 1 Corinthians 3. God uses men and their gifts, as workmen.



# The House of God:

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<sup>9</sup> For we are God's fellow-workmen; ye are God's husbandry, God's building.

<sup>10</sup> According to the grace of God which has been given to me, as a wise architect, I have laid the foundation, but another builds upon it. But let each see how he builds upon it.

<sup>11</sup> For other foundation can no man lay besides that which [is] laid, which is Jesus Christ.

<sup>12</sup> Now if any one build upon [this] foundation, gold, silver, precious stones, wood, grass, straw,

<sup>13</sup> the work of each shall be made manifest; for the day shall declare [it], because it is revealed in fire; and the fire shall try the work of each what it is.

<sup>14</sup> If the work of any one which he has built upon [the foundation] shall abide, he shall receive a reward.

<sup>15</sup> If the work of any one shall be consumed, he shall suffer loss, but \*he\* shall be saved, but so as through [the] fire.

<sup>16</sup> Do ye not know that ye are [the] temple of God, and [that] the Spirit of God dwells in you?

<sup>17</sup> If any one corrupt the temple of God, \*him\* shall God destroy; for the temple of God is holy, and such are \*ye\*.

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**GOD'S HOUSE that  
Christ builds = PERFECT**

**GOD'S HOUSE with man  
being used in the work =  
POTENTIAL OF FAILURE**

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We see a different aspect of God's building, in Matthew 16:18; 1 Peter 1:4-5 and Ephesians 2:20-21 we see the assembly as a building that Satan's power cannot prevail against, a holy temple where nothing defiling can enter. Under this aspect the Lord is the builder Himself and no fellow-workers are mentioned.

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Here, in 1 Corinthians 3 we see that God uses us to build. We work together, under God – and there is the potential and a warning against failure in how and with what material we work.

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*<sup>9</sup> For we are God's fellow-workmen; ye are God's husbandry, God's building.*

V9 workmen together with God – we have a part, but we are not “independent operators” (see the context of 1 Cor. 3).

Workmen, husbandry and building are God's.

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*<sup>10</sup> According to the grace of God which has been given to me, as a wise architect, I have laid the foundation, but another builds upon it. But let each see how he builds upon it. <sup>11</sup> For other foundation can no man lay besides that which [is] laid, which is Jesus Christ.*

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Paul compares himself to a wise master-builder but, even so, he only has his part in the process; there is work for other believers to do as well. Each builder needs to take care in what he does. The wisdom is not in the building skill but in the choice of material that is being used.

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The foundation is laid (see sessions 1 and 2) – it is Jesus Christ. Paul preached Christ to the Corinthians and they received Him in their hearts.

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Paul had been used to lay the foundation of the assembly at Corinth in his testimony to Jesus Christ. He preached Christ, with the result that a company of people was led to believe in Jesus. In apostolic power and grace the foundation had been truly laid — Christ in the souls of believers.

*“For I did not judge [it well] to know anything among you save **Jesus Christ**, and **\*him\* crucified.**”* 1. Corinthians 2:2





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*12 Now if any one build upon [this] foundation, gold, silver, precious stones, wood, grass, straw,*

V12 Various materials – three good (gold, silver, precious stones)

but also three worthless (they can't stand the fire, hay and stubble do not last)

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*13 the work of each shall be made manifest; for the day shall declare [it], because it is revealed in fire; and the fire shall try the work of each what it is.*



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The different materials being used in  
building:

“gold, silver, precious stones” =  
apostolic truth

“wood, hay, stubble” =  
man's wisdom

(see context of 1. Corinthians)





The House of God:

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Everyone's work will be tested and made manifest, become visible as what it is. In fulness this this is a future thing.

The day shall declare it = (the day of the Lord's judgment) for us this is the judgment seat (Romans 14:10; 2. Corinthians 5:10)

*"that ye may be blameless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ."*

1 Corinthians 1:8





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The main distinction between:

“gold, silver, precious stones” – sound doctrine, apostolic truth

“wood, hay, stubble” – false doctrine, human ideas

(But the fact that three distinct materials are mentioned in both cases might indicate that there are differences in the value of the doctrines taught, some errors are worse than others.)



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- *<sup>14</sup> If the work of any one which he has built upon [the foundation] shall abide, he shall receive a reward.*
- *<sup>15</sup> If the work of any one shall be consumed, he shall suffer loss, but \*he\* shall be saved, but so as through [the] fire.*



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We have seen workmen wise or negligent,

materials costly and durable or perishable and worthless,

with a reward as the result on the one hand, or the workman suffering the loss of his work and his person only saved with difficulty.

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V13-15 “the day” will declare what each fellow-worker has done in the sight of God.

The judgment seat of Christ; rewards, and losses.

*“<sup>10</sup> For we must all be manifested before the judgment-seat of the Christ, that each may receive the things [done] in the body, according to those he has done, whether [it be] good or evil.*

2. Corinthians 5:10-11





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Is the Christian being judged after all?

No judgment: It says "appear" and "made manifest"

The result of the judgment seat will be that we see our lives as the Lord sees them

This is needed for us to enjoy full fellowship with Him in eternity

There will be reward for what was good, but also loss for what was not good

Our assessment of what we have done might be wrong

We are told this now, so that it has a present effect on our work and ministry

Much that looks "good" and "large" as a work for God will not stand the fire of God's judgement

We should be careful how and with what material we build

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If God will manifest the quality of everyone's work only in the future, why are we told about this now?

**All that lets in the light of God's future on present occupation is wholesome not only for His servant, but for all concerned.**

W Kelly



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*“Saved, yet so as through fire”*

The context is work and ministry of the believer, he will be saved, God will take care of this – but it is possible that all the work that has been done will be burnt up!

A builder might escape but see his building ruined by fire.



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Purgatory? It is well known that Rome has founded on this passage one of its chief proofs of purgatory; but this is itself a sample of the refuse against which the apostle warns. For it is evident that not the faithful in general or their ways are in question, but ministers and their doctrine and again that a day of sifting judgment is meant and not some intermediate state now after death. Fire is the figurative expression of His judicial action which consumes all dross, not punishment for the separate spirit or soul, nor even a process of purifying it. "Saved, yet so as through fire," is to mark the difficulty of it; yet will God take care that so it shall be. So, as has been said, a builder might see his building ruined by fire, yet himself escape. Besides each one's work is to be thus tested — the apostle's work as certainly as that of his detractors, and gold, silver, and precious stones are subjected to the fire no less than the consumable material. Does all this apply to Romanist ideas of purgatory? The real point is the danger of introducing rubbish even where the true foundation is owned, not fundamental error or Antichristianism, but airy notions, lax maxims as to practice, etc., which the day of trial would detect and destroy. It was not so with his work whom some at Corinth had despised.

W Kelly

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“Do you not know that you are God’s temple and  
that God’s Spirit dwells in you?”

–1 Corinthians 3:16



- V. 16 brings in the thought of the House of God as His temple, (see session 2), but here the emphasis is on holiness (Psalm 93:5). What is being built (locally, as representative of the house as a whole) must be holy

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*16 Do ye not know that ye are [the] temple of God, and [that] the Spirit of God dwells in you?*

*17 If any one corrupt the temple of God, \*him\* shall God destroy; for the temple of God is holy, and such are \*ye\*.*

- 1) Verse 14 — a builder building good material upon the foundation, believer
- 2) Verse 15 — a builder builds bad material upon the foundation, believer
- 3) Verse 17 — a builder sets out to destroy (corrupt) the temple of God, unbeliever

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Verse 17 mentions a third category of persons whose work is positively destructive in its effect on the building. This is very solemn, as we see here: Did the Corinthians not know that as God's building they had the character of His temple? God by His Spirit dwelled in them, so there is a very sacred character to the church collectively.

Here the possibility to "defile," or "corrupt," or "destroy," God's temple was terribly serious. If in the coming day any man's work is found to be of that destructive character, God will destroy him.

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"But the end of all things is drawn nigh: be sober therefore, and be watchful unto prayers; but before all this having fervent love among yourselves, because love covers a multitude of sins; hospitable one to another, without murmuring; each according as he has received a gift, ministering it to one another, as good stewards of the various grace of God. If one speak — as oracles of god; if any one minister — as of strength which God supplies; that God in all things may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom is the glory and the might for ages of ages. Amen."

[1 Peter 4:7-11](#)