

1 Corinthians 3:5-23

“Take Heed How You Build”

Focusing on the instrument is futile; it's the One wielding it who's doing the work. That was the basic thrust of what we were considering as our time together last week came to a close, a scalpel left to itself can do nothing, but when picked up and utilized by the hands of a skillful surgeon it can save your life. **A guitar sitting there on its stand won't do a thing, it's completely incapable, but when placed in the hands of an accomplished musician it makes beautiful music. So to when it comes to the instruments that God wields and works through, left to themselves they're absolutely incapable of accomplishing anything of eternal value.** Jesus put it like this, “...*without Me you can do nothing.*” John 15:5 But when God picks them up, places them in His hands, and begins to work *in* them, and flow *through* them, then amazing things begin to happen, lives are changed, souls are saved, people begin to grow and mature in Christ. But somehow in the midst of all that this weird backlash can take place whereby people can begin to think that it's the instrument that's so essential as opposed to the One who's wielding it. **But the fact is that guitars are a dime a dozen, an accomplished musician is a rare find, scalpels are manufactured by the millions, skilled surgeons are difficult to come by. and That illustration only amplifies in Christ, because instruments that are available are as many as there are people on the planet, (not that people are the only objects that could be utilized as instruments, but my point is that potential instruments are plentiful).** But as for the Masterful Musician, or the Skilled Surgeon Who's able to perform life saving surgery on our soul, there's only One. and So we do well to maintain the proper perspective realizing that focusing on the instrument is futile, it's fruitless, absolutely pointless. But as for the One wielding that instrument, He's the One that we're to magnify, to glorify, to identify *with* and give our lives *to*. (Notice)

Vs5-7

Don't focus on the sower; focus on the grower, the One who gives the increase which is God. It's the Lord that gives the increase or causes growth, be it in our lives personally, or in our midst collectively. Remember there in Acts Ch 2 on the day of Pentecost, Peter stood up and shared the message of the death and resurrection of Christ with the crowd that was gathered around checking things out, seeing what was going on and 3,000 of them responded and received Christ as their personal Savior. Cut to the quick and blown away by the fact that Jesus was delivered up for our transgression and raised for our justification. and There they were, the church was born, and they just continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers. and Do you remember the results, what it was that was taking place? The bible tells us, “*And the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved.*” Acts 2:47 The apostles weren't adding to the church, they were simply instruments, or vessels through whom *the Lord* was adding, increasing, causing growth.

and That's what Paul is saying here, we're not the one's *on* whom you believed, but simply *through* whom you believed, we were simply *instrumental* in the work, but the One who was using the instruments, accomplishing the objective, was God. and It's important that it be that way because the bible tells us that, “*Unless the LORD builds the house, They labor in vain who build it;*” Ps 127:1.

Which is to say that our labor apart from the Lord doing the work (as it pertains to efforts that'll make an eternal impact) is absolutely pointless. **No matter how noble the cause may seem, if it's not God doing it *in* you, flowing by His Spirit to accomplish it *through* you, than you may as well not even waste your energy, because it won't count for eternity.**

That's why it's so critical that we seek to be led of the Spirit when it comes to our labor, our efforts, the things we invest our energy into. Because the bible is clear that, "...*your labor is not in vain in the Lord.*" 1 Cor 15:58 But our labor *apart* from the Lord is *totally* in vain (and we'll see that a little more clearly in just a bit).

Now, as we observe this a bit more closely there's something else that we begin to pick up on here and that is this; in creating His musical masterpiece He utilizes more than one kind of instrument. As the skillful surgeon He's not limited to the procedural/precision slicing of the scalpel, that when it comes to farming His field, there are numerous tools that God uses to bring forth fruit and cultivate His crop.

Notice in Vs 6 Paul tells us, "I planted, Apollos watered." Now what's exactly does that mean? As you study the scriptures you come to find that amongst other things the bible likens the Word of God to seed, and the human heart the bible will at times liken unto soil. Leave 1st Cor and make your way back to Mark Ch 4. **and Here in Mark Ch 4 you'll find Jesus teaching the parable of the sower. and He says that a certain sower went out to sow and as he began to sow the seed some of it fell by the wayside and the birds of the air snatched it up. Some of it fell on stony ground, not much soil for it to root in, so it sprang up immediately but when the heat of the day bore down on it, it withered away.** Still more fell among thorns and the thorns grew up around it, choked it out so that it yielded no crop. But then some of it fell on good ground, it rooted down, grew up and yielded a crop, some produced 30, some 60, and some 100 fold. Later on the disciples asked Him what in the world that parable meant. Look at Vs 14 (read thru 20)

So God's Word in many ways is like unto seed, and the human heart is comparative to the soil of the earth. Now there's probably not many of us who've done a whole lot of farming, but most of us know enough to know that there's more than one type of laborer that's needed if you're going to have a fruitful yield. You're going to need certain laborers that simply plant, that is they till the soil, bust up the fallow ground, and insert the seed, in this case the seed being referenced is the gospel of Jesus Christ implanted into the hearts of humanity. (Now some of those hearts won't receive it, or they're shallow and won't endure, but the planter is just out there scattering that seed, he's objectively aiming for good soil, but there's work to be done and not all of it is going to land in prime places).

But then there's others that need to follow up behind the planters so as to water the seed that's been planted. They spill the water of the word into those freshly cultivated hearts, they come along and instruct, affirm and confirm, ensuring that environment is maintained for healthy growth, strong roots and all of that. Then once the growth begins there's still others that root out the weeds and those things that want to rob the nutrients of the crop, or choke it out and kill it off.

But Paul's point is this; God calls different people to different roles in the cultivating of His crop even within the arena of sharing His Word. But really planting is nothing, and watering is nothing, because I can plant a seed, but I can't make it grow, and I can water a seed, but I can't make it grow.

I can foster a proper environment, but I can't cause the miracle of life to transpire within that seed. That's God's job, God does the work, causes the increase. and So here we do our very best to provide the proper environment, we're plowing, planting, watering, and nurturing, but as for the growth, that's between you and the Lord. If you want to dig in your heels and not allow the Lord to foster growth in your life, there's nothing I can do about that. But if you want to grow, we're all about providing the proper environment.

Vs8

What's the point here, that though one's role and ministry may vary from another's, we're not competing against one another; we're co-laboring and complementary towards one another. You and I may have a different *directive*, but we're all working towards the same *objective*. In other words God may've called me to this role, and you to another role, but we all are working towards and wanting to see the same thing. **People being born again, we want to see people disciplined in Christ, Jesus being magnified and glorified in their lives; we want to see God using their lives. Whether you're an evangelist, a pastor/teacher, a worship leader, an usher, a greeter, a youth leader, c.m. teacher, or whatever, maybe you're none of the above, simply a soul in love with Jesus, that's ok we're all on the same team, share the same heart and want to see the same things, so we work together.** "He who plants and he who waters are one." He's saying, "You're seeking to set us against one another, when in reality we're working *with* one another. The objective of the planter won't happen without the water, but without the seed being planted there's nothing *to* water. **So we need each other, we work together, we also need the reapers, all the planting and all the watering in the world won't do any good if no one reaps the harvest. But without the work of the planters and waterers there won't be any harvest, you see we're all working together, different directives perhaps, but the same overall objective.**

But notice that God *will* make distinctions with respect to rewards. He says, "He who plants and he who waters are one, and *each one* will receive *his own* reward according to *his own* labor." and This is really a mystery to me but it's just another example of the overwhelming love of our Heavenly Father. He does all the work, but then gives *us* a reward as though we actually did something. Jesus said, "*For the Son of Man will come in the glory of His Father with His angels, and then He will reward each according to his works.*" Matt 16:27 He said, "...*behold, I am coming quickly, and My reward is with Me, to give to every one according to his work.*" Rev 22:12 **and Every now and then you run across that pseudo super-spiritual person who says, "I don't care about rewards as long as I get there." and That sounds real spiritual, but according to Jesus we need to care. Now I'll be honest with you, I don't pretend to know the full significance of Heavenly rewards, but it's not a small theme throughout the pages of the NT, it's substantial.** Later on we'll read, "*Do you not know that those who run in a race all run, but one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you may obtain it. And everyone who competes for the prize is temperate in all things. Now they do it to obtain a perishable crown, but we for an imperishable crown.*" 1 Cor 9:24-25

He told the Philippians, “*Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended; but one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead, I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.*” Phil 3:13-14 **Work hard for the Lord, labor diligently for the Lord, don’t have a small vision, have a big vision, don’t see how little you can get by on. I’ll guarantee you when you see Jesus face to face you won’t go, “If I knew this was all there was I’d have never worked so hard.” You’ll only wish you’d have done more labored more diligently, “...and each will receive his own reward according to his own labor.”**

Vs9

Look at the 1st ½ of this Vs, “We are God’s fellow workers.” Now does God need us? No, but He’s chosen to partner with us in the accomplishing of His work.

and There’s plenty of work to be done, that’s why Jesus said, “*The harvest truly is great, but the laborers are few; therefore pray the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into His harvest.*” Luke 10:2 God has opted to use man to reach man, but the problem is that man needs to be willing. **You might ask yourself this question; “In what way am I contributing to the Kingdom?” Or, “In what way am I laboring in the Lord?” and If you’re drawing a big blank, ask God to point you in a direction whereby you might be utilized as a laborer, as His fellow worker in this world making an eternal impact to the glory of His name.**

You see we’re His field, and not just individually, but collectively. and As His field He expects that we be fruitful, that He find the fruit of the Spirit here, that both collectively and individually as He observes the field of our lives that He would find the fruit of holiness *personally*. **That we would be those who give *financially*, who are about good works *practically*, who offer the sacrifice of praise to Him *willfully/joyfully/consistently*, that people come to Christ through the work He’s doing in our lives and in this place *specifically*. We’re God’s field, and as such we’re to tend to it, take good care of it, work diligently in it, because *while we slumber the enemy plots and plans*. He gets in there and sows weeds alongside of the wheat; he sows seeds of discord, and lies, envy, strife and division. and So we need to be those who are constantly tending to the field, implanting the seed of God’s word, watering it, nurturing it, cultivating it, that the Lord might find plenty of fruit in it.**

Vs9

with that Paul pivots his illustration from farming to framing, from cultivation to construction; both of which are demanding of hard work and labor. and He’s quick to point out that it’s because he’s so great that God uses His life, it’s because *God* is so great that his life is being used, it’s the grace of God at work in him, and the same is true for you, and the same is true for me.

Vs10-11

The fundamental, foundational bedrock root of the church is nothing other than the person and work of Jesus Christ Remember when Jesus asked His disciples, “Who do men say that I the Son of Man am?” and They said, “Some say You’re J.B., others say you’re Elijah, or Jeremiah, perhaps one of the other prophets.” Jesus said, “But who do you say that I am?” Peter answered, “You’re the Christ, the Son of the Living God.” Jesus said, “Blessed are you Simon-bar Jonah, for flesh and blood did not reveal this to you, but my Father who is in Heaven.”

He said, “You are Peter, (that is a little pebble) but upon this *rock*, (that is, this mountainous boulder) I will build My church and the gates of hell shall not prevail.” and This is where our Catholic friends went wrong in that they thought Jesus was saying that He’d build His church on the foundation of Peter, but what Jesus was saying is that Peter you’re a little pebble, but your confession is monumental, enormous, and it’s upon that reality, of My person, and My work that I will build My church. “No other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ” That’s the only foundation that undergirds the church, if something is built on another foundation, than here’s the deal, it’s not the church. Because the only foundation upon which the church rests is the person and work of Jesus Christ there is no other.

and Paul came along and laid that foundation in Corinth, and Apollos came along and began to build on that, to water the seed. and Paul issues a warning really to anyone who would look to build on the foundation, that he take heed, that is be careful how he builds. Because though the church can’t be built on any foundation other than Jesus Christ That foundation can be built upon in an unworthy, in fact shameful manner, notice.

Vs12-15

So you see there’s more than one kind of material that can be used to build upon a solid foundation. There are lasting materials, (gold, silver, precious stones, and it’s not jewels that are in view here but stones such as marble or granite), and then there are perishable materials such as wood, hay, and straw. and The Day is coming whereby God will test the type of material that all His fellow-workers, and co-laborers decided to settle in and build with. We see it there in Vs 13 where we read that each one’s work will become clear, or be made manifest. Did we choose gold, silver, precious stones, did we establish a lasting work to the glory of God? Or did we choose wood, hay, straw, materials that will just go up in smoke?

and The big question is, what is it that determines what type of materials I’m using? What does it mean to use lasting materials as opposed to perishable materials, what makes the difference? That’s a great question, and I wish Paul would’ve put it real plainly but he didn’t, and there are a few different ideas here. But to me what seems to be most evident based upon the context is the doctrinal integrity and purity that we invest into both our own lives, and then into other people’s lives as well. Remember the overall context here is the foolishness of man Vs the wisdom of God, we don’t see that so much in our little chunk today, but if you look at the big picture from Ch 1 up to this point, you’ll see it. So the reference seems to be to the solid nurturing sustenance of the Word of God, Vs the junk-food, ideologies, philosophies and wisdom of man.

and If you follow the flow of the Ch it’s what seems to me to be the wisest understanding in that in Paul illustrates God’s Word in 3 ways in this Ch. In the 1st few Vs it’s seen as food for the family, whereby we grow and are nurtured, in Vs 6-9 we see it pictured as seed for the field whereby we might lead fruitful lives. and In these Vs Paul portrays the Word of God as materials by which we build, as we become instrumental in the building of the temple of God, that is the church.

Though the primary application is the church leaders, it definitely has its place in the life of *every* believer. Because the work done through each individual believer's life will be tested, how will it be tested? Again Vs 13 tells us that it'll be tested by fire. So the work that you've done *for* the Lord, as *unto* the Lord, or in *the name* of the Lord will be tested, somehow and in *some way* all of our works will be ran as it were through the fire. and I'm certain that a significant chunk of our works will be immediately incinerated. But it's our desire, and our hope that much of what's run through the fire, will survive the fire and come through as effort that will endure for eternity being established as these precious materials with which we've built.

Vs 14 tells us that if anyone's work which he has built on it (that is the foundation of Jesus Christ) endures, he will receive a reward.

Now, a couple of things here real quick that I want you to see, and we'll pick up the pace. #1 What "Day" is it that these works will be tested? This is a reference to the Day of Judgment, but what you need to understand here is that this is not the White throne Judgment of Rev Ch 20 whereby the books will be opened and the dead both small and great will stand before the throne, and another book will be opened which is the Book of Life. and The dead will be judged according to their works and whoever's name isn't found written in the book of Life will be cast in the Lake of fire. *This Day* in 1st Cor 3 is not *that* day. This is the judgment seat of Christ (referenced again in 2nd Cor 5) whereby believers have their *works* judged. This is not a matter of salvation, notice Vs 15 (read again). *There will be people who have all their works burned and have nothing in eternity to show for their lives on earth (as it relates to what they've done that's counted for the Kingdom.)* But as for your salvation, that has nothing to do with your works, it's a free gift predicated upon faith in Jesus Christ and His finished work upon the cross. It's by grace that you're saved, through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works lest anyone should boast. So this isn't the White throne judgment whereby non-believers are judged and their fate is sealed having rejected Jesus Christ This is a judgment where believers stand before Christ to receive the rewards for the works they've done in His name. (Like an Olympic reward ceremony)

#2 I want you to note that it's not the *amount* of work that's judged, but rather it's the *sort* of work that's judged. It's not the quantity, because God will do different things in different people's lives, but rather it's the quality.

We're talking here about the motive of the heart, why I did what I did. We've spoke about working hard for the Lord, why am I doing that. Because I feel legally obligated? Or out of the overflow of love for my Lord? and No doubt this plays part in the type of materials that I'm using. If I lay out solid doctrine with self seeking ambitions, that'll burn just the same. So the manner of material I use and the motive behind using it, it's all going to be fed through the fire.

and By the way this passage has nothing to do with purgatory, the fire doesn't purify the *worker*, it tests the *workmanship*. Purgatory is a thoroughly unbiblical invention of man, it's not scriptural at all and flies in the face of the finished work of the cross. Look at Vs 16

Vs16-17

Let me cut to the chase. This is not a reference to your body singularly being the temple of the Holy Spirit. He *will* speak of that when we get to the end of Ch 6, the word “you” in Vs 16 is not singular, it is 2nd person plural, meaning “You all.” **This is a reference we as living stones individually being built *together* to make up the body of Christ or the church *collectively*. The idea here is what Paul was communicating to the Ephesians when he said, “... you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone, in whom the whole building, being fitted together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord, in whom you also are being built together for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit.” Eph 2:19-22** The Spirit of God dwells not only in our being personally, but in our midst corporately as we gather together, remember Jesus said that wherever 2 or more are gathered in My name there I will also be.

and So the Spirit dwells in the midst of His church, and if anyone defiles, or destroys the temple, God will destroy him, for the temple of God is holy. Translation; be careful when you start doing damage to the church of God. Remember the context, Paul was warning them (Vs 3) regarding division, discord, strife, bitter envy and contention. and The idea here is that you’re going to reap what you sow, you sow to the wind, you’ll reap the whirlwind. and So we do well to go to great measures in order that we not defile or in anyway destroy the temple, the dwelling place of God be it on an individual or a corporate level, we’re to safeguard the sanctity and the holy habitation of the Lord. **It’s easy for us to get upset and start doing damage to the body of Christ, Paul says don’t do that, be careful, because that’s the temple of God we’re messing with and God has a tendency to take that sort of thing personally. Doesn’t mean there can’t be forgiveness, restoration and all of that, but don’t take for granted that it’s all good between you and God if you’re dealing damaging blows to His body.**

Vs18-20

Now we’ve spoken about this quite a bit lately so we won’t rehash it, God doesn’t think like man thinks, man’s wisdom i.e. humanistic philosophy and psychology is foolishness to God, the thoughts of the wise of this world are futile.

Vs21-23

Let no one glory in men, how prone we are to glory in men, we want to be seen with the who’s who, and be identified with the world’s influential people. and That mentality can spill over into the church, some wanted to be seen as Paul’s people, other’s as Apollos’ people. Paul says, “Let no one boast in men.” and He says, “For all are yours.” **In other word’s both Paul, Apollos, and Peter, we’re all yours in Christ. Chuck Smith, Billy Graham, doesn’t matter who it is, in Christ everyone is for the building up and benefit of the whole. So all are yours, this world, life, death, everything. So many people think that death is against us, not true, in Christ it’s for you, it belongs to you, it doesn’t work against you. It opens the door for you, becomes your servant by which you’re ushered into the very presence of God.**

In Christ *all* things are yours. You say, “Is that true?” Yeah, that’s true, that’s the liberty you’ve been called to in Christ. “Well than hey, I guess I can do what I want, go where I want, watch what I want and take what I want right?” Well, the fact that all things are yours is only 1 side of the equation, did you note the other side in Vs 23? “**And you are Christ’s, and Christ is God’s.**” **You belong to the only begotten Son of God. and So if you’ll really remember that you are Christ’s, and all that that entails personally and practically...than all things are yours. That’s the beautiful balance between Christian liberty, and Christian responsibility.** You’re God’s fellow worker, you’re God’s building, take heed how you build, safeguard the material and the motive. I want to see you stand before Christ on that Day and just watch as your work, after work, after work endures the fire, that great might be your reward, that you might hear those words, “Well done good and faithful servant, you were faithful over a few things I will make you ruler over many. Enter into the joy of your Lord.”

Prayer Points:

God, help us to lead lives worthy to hear those words, not because of who we are, but because of who You are in us, Your abounding and abundant grace flowing through us. We want to be true to what it means to belong to You, help us to honor You in the things that we both say, and do. and Father teach us to take heed how we build. Teach us to build with enduring materials, gold, silver, precious stones, and not to waste our time with wood, hay and straw, purify our motives and have Your way in us and through us for Your name’s sake, and for the greatness of Your glory.

If you’ve never given your heart to Christ you need to know that God wants to lay the foundation of the person and work of Jesus Christ in your heart and in your life today. The bible says that if anyone be in Christ he’s a new creation, old things pass away, behold all things are made new. God does more than a simple renovation, He does a total transformation. He does away with the old life altogether and gives you a brand new life. It’s as simple as trusting in the work of Christ upon the cross, for the forgiveness of your sin. Don’t reject it, don’t resist it, simply receive it and walk in it, just cry out to the Lord, give your heart to the Lord, and so shall you be saved *by* the Lord.