

## BE CAREFUL HOW YOU BUILD

### *Christian Service in Light of the Judgment Seat of Christ*

**Text:** 1 Corinthians 3:9-17

#### **Introduction:**

1. There are numerous references to the Judgment Seat of Christ in the New Testament. This is the major passage that deals with the subject. The Judgment Seat of Christ is a prophetic event that will occur after the Rapture. It will happen “when the Lord come” (1 Cor. 4:5). It is a major theme of the New Testament. See Rom. 14:10-12; 1 Cor. 3:11-15; 4:5; 2 Cor. 5:9-10; Eph. 6:8-9; Col. 3:24-25; 2 Tim. 4:1; Rev. 2:23.
2. You must understand the distinction between the Judgment Seat of Christ and the Great White Throne Judgment (Rev. 20:10-15). The Judgment Seat of Christ is for the saved to review their service. The Great White Throne Judgment is for the unsaved and is to do with their salvation.
3. The context: The Apostle has just addressed the problem of carnal divisions within the church (Vs. 1-4) and has sought to correct their attitude towards ministers (Vs. 5-9)
4. The Apostle now exhorts them concerning the fact that the Corinthian church is God’s building (Vs. 9b) and that they are to be careful how they build in the local church in light of the fact that they will give an account at the Judgment Seat of Christ. The figure of a building is a common figure for the local church. The church is called “an holy temple in the Lord” (Eph. 2:21) and a “habitation of God through the Spirit” (Eph. 2:22). It is called “the house of God” (1 Tim. 3:15). Therefore, we must **build right** in the church and our Christian lives.
5. Observe **3 lessons** concerning building right in light of the Judgment Seat of Christ.

#### **I. THE MASTERPLAN FOR BUILDING RIGHT (VS. 9-11)**

##### **A. The Architect of the Building (Vs. 10-11)**

1. Paul’s Enablement in the Work (Vs. 10a)

The church at Corinth had not been built in Paul’s own strength and wisdom. He had been divinely enabled to plant the church. God had given Paul:

- a. **Grace** to Build the Church – We need God’s grace to save, but we also need God’s grace to serve! Grace is needed to build a local church! God’s work can only be done in God’s way and with God’s power.
- b. **Wisdom** to Build the Church
  - i. ‘wise’ = the blueprint for the building of the local church came from God. This was a church built by God’s wisdom, not man’s.
  - ii. ‘masterbuilder’ = our word ‘architect’ is based on this word. “The master builder had the responsibility of the planning and construction of the building...” (Key)

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- iii. “another buildeth thereon” = the carpenters have need of caution how they carry out the plans of the original architect. There is no room for individual caprice in the superstructure (RWP). **The pattern for N.T. churches has been set down for us in the Scriptures. We are to seek to emulate the Apostolic pattern.**
2. Paul’s Establishment of the Work (Vs. 10b-11)
  - a. Jesus Christ was the sole foundation for the Corinthian Church (Vs. 10b). Paul’s ministry was Christ-centred. His ministry was characterised by the preaching of Christ and His cross, in the power of the Holy Spirit (See 1:18; 2:1-5).
  - b. Jesus Christ is the sole foundation for any N.T. church (Vs. 11). To try and build on any other foundation is to build on quicksand instead of the rock (Matt. 7:24-27). Christ is the foundation and focus of our faith, and the church is built upon His Person and His Work. We must get our Christology razor-sharp accurate! I.E., His eternality, deity, virgin birth, sinless life, vicarious death, blood atonement, resurrection, etc...
  - c. Note: The only foundation for your personal salvation is Christ. You must come to rest on His finished work, not your own works, as the ground for your salvation.

### B. The Admonition to the Builders (Vs. 10b-11)

Paul exhorts them to give attention to:

1. The Practice of their Building (Vs. 10b)
  - a. “take heed” = to look at, see, give attention to.
  - b. ‘how’ = there are different ways in which we can build upon our foundation in Christ. We are to be careful to ensure that the **way** we build the work of God is a continuation of the Christ-centred, Spirit-anointed establishment it had in its inception.
  - c. There is a special challenge to preachers. It is possible for a church that was founded and established as a work of the Spirit, with Christ central, to later take a different direction and form under a man who builds according to human wisdom.
2. The Parameters for their Building (Vs. 11)

A foundation not only provides the necessary support for the building but also establishes its boundaries.

  - a. What we build is to be consistent with, in conformity to and within the confines of the foundation. Just as a building must meet the building code of a jurisdiction, so in the spiritual realm, our work must be according to the Divine, Christological code as found in the Word of God. Our ministry needs to be Christ-centred and Christ-honouring. It needs to be in accordance with the standards of Christ’s Word.
  - d. As we seek to build up the church of God as individual members, is it consistent with our foundation, which is Christ? How are we building our lives?

## II. THE MATERIALS FOR BUILDING RIGHT (VS. 12)

We have new, permanent standing in Christ once we become Christians. But we have a choice as to what kind of lives and ministries we will build

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upon that privileged position. Paul contrasts building with **choice** materials with building with **cheap** materials. We are presented with a choice between these two kinds of materials:

### A. The Eternal (12a)

1. The Catalogue of the Right Materials – The first triplet is gold, silver and precious stones.
  - a. Gold – used in adorning ancient temples.
  - b. Silver – also used in adorning temples.
  - c. Precious Stones – stones valuable for building, such as granite and marble.
  - d. The “gold, silver, and precious stones” denote that which is of God, that which is imperishable and thus has eternal value, that which is of God’s Word.
2. The Characteristics of the Right Materials – they are precious and permanent.  
What do they represent?
  - a. Service that is done God’s way for God’s glory (not carnal service).
  - b. Service done according to the godly rather than worldly wisdom.
  - c. Service done in God’s power rather than our own (2:4) (produced in and through us by the Holy Spirit).
  - d. Service done in accordance with the Word of God.

### B. The Temporal (12b)

1. The Catalogue of the Wrong Materials – the second triplet is wood, hay and stubble.
  - a. Wood
  - b. Hay
  - c. Stubble
  - d. Hodge notes that “wood, hay, stubble” are the perishable materials out of which ordinary houses were built, but not temples. Wood for the doors and posts; hay, dried grass mixed with mud for the walls and stubble (straw) for the roof.”
2. The Characteristics of the Wrong Materials – they are perishable and passing.  
What do they represent?
  - a. Compromised Service – building according to worldly wisdom rather than God’s Word.
    - i. Many **churches** today are built with the wood, hay and stubble of worldly wisdom. Illustration: The church growth gurus (e.g., Rick Warren) who use worldly methods and messages to build “successful” churches. I.e., tailor the church music to the community's tastes and conform the message to the audience's felt needs. Entertain rather than exhort. Replace preaching with talks, sacred songs with sensual songs, prayer meetings with programs, etc.
    - ii. Many **Christians** today are building their lives with the wood, hay and stubble of worldly wisdom instead of the gold, silver and precious stones of truth.

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- b. Carnal Service – service done in the wrong way and for the wrong reasons. Service that is self-centred rather than Christ centred. Service that is man-focused rather than God-focused.

### III. THE MOTIVATION FOR BUILDING RIGHT (VS. 13-15)

Paul adds further weight to the exhortation by reminding his readers of the solemn reality that they will all give an account for their service before the Judgment Seat of Christ. What will happen at the Judgment Seat of Christ?

#### A. Our Service will be Revealed (Vs. 13)

1. The Time of the Revealing – the Judgment seat of Christ (13a)
  - a. 'manifest' = means "to make to shine, to cause to appear". The same word is translated 'openly' (Mt. 6:4), "make known" (Mt. 12:16) and "appear" (1 Tim. 4:15).
  - b. "the day" = the Judgment Seat of Christ
    - i. 2 Corinthians 5:10 "For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive **the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad**"
    - ii. Romans 14:10-12 "...for we shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ. For it is written, As I live, saith the Lord, every knee shall bow to me, and every tongue shall confess to God. So then every one of us **shall give account of himself to God.**"
  - a. 'declare' = to make visible, plain or clear.
  - b. "what sort it is" = the true character/quality of our Christian service will be brought out into the open and exposed for what it truly is.
  - c. 1 Cor. 4:5 "Therefore judge nothing before the time, until the Lord come, who both will **bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and will make manifest the counsels of the hearts**: and then shall every man have praise of God."
2. The Test at the Revealing – the Fire (13b)
  - a. Our works will be put to the test at the judgment seat of Christ – "revealed by **fire**; and the **fire** shall try every man's work of what sort it is". The word 'try' is also translated 'discern' (Lk. 12:56), 'prove' (Lk. 14:19, Rom. 12:2, 2 Cor. 8:8, 13:5, Gal. 6:4) and 'examine' (1 Cor. 11:28).
  - b. "The fire is designed neither to punish the person nor to refine the believer or his work, but to unmask the essence of his Christian effort (to show it like it really is). It will test the work to determine its quality ('sort'), not its quantity ('how much') (Gromacki)
  - c. What does the fire speak of?
  - d. **The Fire of God's Holiness**: Hebrews 12:29 "For our God is a **consuming fire.**" (Duet. 4:24) "The fire is suggestive of the testing character of the holiness of God, which when brought into contact with evil consumes it. It is the nature of fire to separate the destructible from the indestructible." (W.E. Vine)

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- e. **The Fire of God's Word:** Jeremiah 23:29 **"Is not my word like as a fire?** saith the LORD; and like a hammer that breaketh the rock in pieces?" If you want to be rewarded for your service, you must serve in obedience to God's Word. Our works and service will be exposed in the light of God's Word. 2 Timothy 2:5 "And if a man also strive for masteries, yet is he not crowned, **except he strive lawfully.**"
- f. **The Fire of Christ's Omniscience:** Revelation 1:14 "His head and his hairs were white like wool, as white as snow; and his **eyes were as a flame of fire;**" (See also Rev. 2:18, 23)
  - i. Christ Himself will review our service. Romans 14:12 "So then every one of us shall give account of **himself** to God."
  - ii. Illustration: Christ's penetrating glance at Peter: Luke 22:61-62 "And the Lord turned, and **looked upon Peter.** And Peter remembered the word of the Lord, how he had said unto him, Before the cock crow, thou shalt deny me thrice. And Peter went out, and wept bitterly."

### B. Our Service may be Rewarded (Vs. 14)

- 1. The Criteria (Vs. 14a)
  - a. 'abide' = remain (that which lasts the purging fire). The wood, hay and stubble will be burned up. Only the gold, silver and precious stones will remain, and we will be rewarded accordingly.
  - b. Note: There are zero rewards for wood, hay, and stubble service. May God keep us from such a wasted Christian life!
- 2. The Crowns (rewards) (Vs. 14b)

There are 5 crowns mentioned in the N.T.

  - a. An incorruptible crown for living a disciplined Christian life (1 Cor. 9:25).
  - b. A crown of rejoicing for winning souls (1 Thess. 2:19).
  - c. A crown of righteousness for loving Christ's appearing (2. Tim. 4:8).
  - d. A crown of life for enduring trials in the Christian life (James 1:12).
  - e. A crown of glory for faithful pastors (1 Peter 5:4)
- 3. The Commendation (Mt. 25:21-23). To hear Christ's "well done thou good and faithful servant" will be the greatest reward.

### C. Our Service may be Reduced to Ashes (Vs. 15)

- 1. What can be lost at the Bema Seat (Vs. 15a)
  - a. "If any man's work shall be burned" = our works can be burned up depending on what materials we have built with (Vs. 12). Note the phrases "every man's work" (Vs. 13), "any man's work" (Vs. 14, 15).
  - b. "he shall suffer loss" = loss of rewards (See Vs. 14).
- 2. What cannot be lost at the Bema Seat (Vs. 15b)
  - a. "he himself shall be saved" = the wood, hay, and stubble works are burned, not the man. At the Judgment Seat of Christ, our **service** is being reviewed, not our **salvation**. The eternal security of the believer could not be plainer and clearer in this

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statement. If the carnal believer who loses everything at the judgment seat of Christ “shall be saved”, how could it be possible for anyone to lose his salvation?

- b. Illustration: A man’s house burns down, but he is spared. The labour of his hands is lost, but he is not.

### D. Our Strife will be Recompensed (Vs. 16-17)

Paul issues a solemn warning to the believers against damaging the church. Remember the context is the judgment seat of Christ (Vs. 10-15). Two truths would motivate them to be careful about their conduct in the church:

#### 1. The Reality of the Church’s Character (Vs. 16)

**The church is:**

- a. **Sacred – “the temple of God”**. The figure of the temple is used of the believer’s body (1 Cor. 6:19-20) and, in this case, of the local church. The pronouns “ye” and “you” are plural. The context is also service in the local church.
- b. **Spirit-indwelt – “the Spirit of God dwelleth in you”**. The church is called “an habitation of God through the Spirit” in Ephesians 2:22. It is a “spiritual house” made of “living stones” (1 Pet. 2:5). The reality of the Spirit’s presence in the assembly should fill us with reverence and godly caution regarding our conduct.
- c. **Set apart – “the temple of God is holy”**. The word ‘holy’ means “sanctified, set apart”. The word holy signifies “separated; separated from sin and consecrated to God.” (Vine) It is God’s special possession. The church is a called-out assembly.
- d. Note: The above truths highlight how serious it is to corrupt the church with our carnality.

#### 2. The Certainty of God’s Correction (Vs. 17)

- a. The words ‘defile’ and ‘destroy’ come from the same Greek word (‘phtheiro’) meaning “to waste, to damage, to corrupt, or to deprave” (Gromacki). This same word is translated “corrupt” in every other usage in the New Testament (1 Cor. 15:33; 2 Cor. 7:2; 11:3; Eph. 4:22; Jude 1:10; Rev. 19:2).
- b. The principle is one of sowing and reaping (Gal. 6:7). The wrecker is wrecked; the destroyer is destroyed; the defiler is defiled; the ruiner is ruined; the damager is damaged. “The church wrecker God will wreck” (A.T. Robertson). “God will ruin the ruiner of His temple” (Phillips).
- c. The Word of God is clear. If you damage God’s church, He will damage you. If you hurt God’s church, He will hurt you. If you destroy God’s church, He will destroy you.
- d. The warning of Vs. 16-17 is a warning to:
  - i. Pastors who damage and destroy good churches through immoral conduct, dictatorial behaviour, false doctrine or defile the church with worldly wisdom and worldly ways.
  - ii. Christians who spread the leaven of false doctrine in the church, thus sowing discord and division.

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- iii. People who get stuck on some pet idea/preference not clearly spelled out in Scripture and make it a point of division and separation in the assembly.
  - iv. Believers who get caught up in the kind of carnal divisions described in the Corinthian church (strife, envy, leadership struggles).
  - v. Trouble makers who cause problems in the church, leave and then spread slander, untruths and distortions of the facts concerning the church and its leadership, and thereby damage its testimony and reputation. E.g., the troublemaker who then presents himself as the victim.
  - vi. Self-centred, self-willed believers who determine to get their own way with little to no thought of how it might affect the unity of the church.
  - vii. Insubordinate members who buck against the Scriptural, legitimate exercise of pastoral authority.
  - viii. Families who allow emotions to cloud their judgment and side with a compromised family member against the preacher, thus disrupting the unity of the church.
  - ix. People who use the church and the pastor as a punching bag for their family problems.
  - x. Embittered Christians who leave a church then go around behind the scenes and poison other believers so that they leave too.
- e. Believers who damage Christ's church can expect **severe chastisement in this life and the loss of rewards** at the Bema seat.

**Conclusion:** How should we respond in light of our future standing before the Judgment Seat of Christ?

1. Search our hearts and confess the "wood, hay, stubble" service before we face Christ at the judgment seat. "For if we would judge ourselves, we should not be judged." (1 Cor. 11:31)
2. Seek the Lord's power and help to build for Him with the correct materials for the future.