



## First Corinthians 3:12-23

### Verse 11 - [From previous session]

We learned last time from this passage that nothing else belongs in the church except the teaching of **Jesus Christ** and the power which comes from the cross (1:18). I would go so far to say we must be careful of even our music ministries. The church's music productions can overshadow the preaching of the cross. Programs, women's ministries, youth ministries, really anything other than the teaching of the cross, can form **another foundation** in which we must take heed (3:10).

It doesn't matter what other churches are doing. The foundation of the church is *only* **Jesus Christ**.

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### Verses 12-15 -

Paul is correcting the Corinthian's error of making men their foundation instead of Christ. They were in heated disagreements and divisions in the church erupted over which church leader was the best. Paul called on them to see that the foundation of the church is the cross of Jesus Christ. How the church builds on that foundation is what matters.

**If any man build upon this foundation** (vs. 12). The word for build is from the Greek word that means to build a house with a roof on it. The foundation has already laid and now the man is building the structure. The church is building upon the foundation of Jesus Christ.

Several materials can be used to build upon the foundation; gold, silver, precious stones, or wood, hay, and stubble. The first three have value, the last three are less valuable and will not last. The work that each Christian puts into building the structure upon the foundation will be seen, literally *open to sight*, and the materials used will one day be tested. It **shall be revealed by fire** (vs. 13). Do not fall into the trap of thinking every time **fire** is mentioned it is referring to hell. Fire often times is a picture or a figure of speech meaning trials.

Paul could be referring to the testing that will come at the Judgment Seat (Bema) of Christ (2 Corinthians 5:10)? Or, does he mean the testing that will come through earthly fiery trials? Paul doesn't explicitly say. Nor does he say what kind of **reward** or **loss** those that build **will receive**. Will the reward come in our lifetime from seeing the fruit of building on the foundation of Christ? Or, is it reserved for a future reward/loss.

Whatever we do on this earth we should strive to do work that **abides** (vs. 14). Our work should be worthwhile. Otherwise it will be **burned** (vs. 15), and he **shall suffer loss**. All the stuff you do on earth, whatever it might be, if it is

not built on the **foundation** of Jesus Christ with costly materials, it's all going to be worthless in the end. Only what is built for Christ will last.

Notice he is not talking about your eternal salvation. **But he himself shall be saved; yet so as by fire** (vs. 15). Once you are saved you are always saved. Your works do not save you. But we will face the fire of trials in our lives.

The bottom line for the Christian; our lives are not one of ease. The Christian life will be tested. We will have trials in this life. It is how we build that will determine the outcome.

Paul admonishes them to build solidly on the foundation.

### Verse 16 -

The wording in the King James Version helps us understand the passage more clearly than all of the modern English versions. It has to do with the pronouns "you" and "ye." **Know ye not that ye are the temple of God** (KJV) or **Do you not know that you are the temple God** (NKJV). A benefit of the KJV is it helps us identify who is the subject of the passage or sentence.

In modern English, we only have one pronoun for the 2nd person and the 2nd person plural, it is "you." When a boss walks into the break room and says, "You are doing a good job," we have to make sure we get the context correct. Does he mean one person in the room? Or, does he mean everyone collectively?

In the KJV, the identity of "**you**" is easily discovered because of the word "**ye**." When the word "ye" is used, it always refers to the group, plural. If "Thou" is used, it is relating to one person. Therefore, "**ye**" in this verse is referring to all in the Corinthian church; "**Ye are the temple of God.**" Why does it matter?

I want to make a proposition that we have misapplied this verse to say *each individual*, singular, is the temple of God or the Holy Spirit? This verse teaches (in its context) that it is the body of Christ (collectively, plural) which is the temple, not the individual. This argument can be strengthened by other passages in the New Testament [See, Ephesians 2:22].

Apparently, the Holy Spirit can indwell each believer, but to say our body is the temple of the Holy Spirit is not what *this* passage teaches. The temple Paul speaks of here is "ye" not "thou." The KJV gives clarity; the newer versions have caused today's confusion.

Is this the reason we worship as a local church body? Paul is speaking to the local body of believers in Corinth, not a universal church, and not to an individual. We should think of the local church as one body and one temple. We are one *in Christ and* **the Spirit of God dwelleth in you.**

### Verse 17 -

The context of verse 16 showed us that Paul was speaking of the entire Corinthian church as being "the temple of God" not the individual. Now, Paul adds, **if any man defile the temple...** He writes of a singular person; One who may come into the temple and defile it. The Greek word for defile is φθείρω [phtheiro /fthi-ro/], which means to mess up, or, corrupt or, *destroy*.

Paul uses this same word in other passages. In 1 Corinthians 8:7, the one defiled is a weak Christian, in 1 Timothy 1:10 it is the one who goes against sound doctrine. In Titus 1:15 one who is defiled is an unbeliever. So Paul says, **if any man defile the temple of God**... Paul could mean an unbeliever who comes in and messes up the church, or perhaps he is referring to a weak believer who causes dissension and brings worldly wisdom into the church. If he is referring to a believer then that man is still saved by grace and is not in danger of losing his salvation.

But what happens to that person who defiles God's temple? God is going to **destroy** him. The word **destroy** is the same Greek word as defile. In other words, if someone comes into the church and messes up the temple of God, God is going to mess that person up. Paul does not say how. But it's a good warning to not bring worldly wisdom into the temple of God.

Why? Because the temple of God is holy, and **ye** are that temple.

Notice that Paul is speaking to the local church in Corinth. His instructions, however, are applicable to churches everywhere. For example the local church of Hope Now Bible Church *Fresno*, and the local church of International Baptist Church in Phnom Penh *Cambodia* are each the **temple of God**. There is no universal body or temple of the church in which Christ dwells. There is no universal visible church or universal invisible church. The Bible only knows of local assemblies. Each local assembly becomes the temple and is the body of Christ.

### Verse 18 -

Paul is addressing the **man** in verse 17, who would defile the temple of God. **Let no man deceive himself**. Paul used the word **deceive** in other passages. Paul was deceived by the law once (Romans 7:11), and it killed him spiritually (legalism kills). In Romans 16:18, he says those who do not adhere to sound doctrine deceive the hearts of the simple in the church.

Therefore, we should not be deceived by the worldly wisdom of man. If there is any man in the church who looks on himself and his sophisticated knowledge with pride, he needs to knock himself down a notch. Let him become a fool, in other words, know Jesus Christ, and him crucified (2:2). Then that man will be wise.

### Verses 19,20 -

It seems Paul cannot hammer home this message enough; the **wisdom of the world is foolishness with God**. He wants the church to take their eyes off men and put them on Christ.

He quotes Job 5:13 (the only place in the N.T. that quotes Job?), *He taketh the wise in their own craftiness*. Maybe that means God *catches* those who try to introduce the world's wisdom into the church? They don't fool God.

One way this craftiness sneaks in and defiles the church is in the area of the church growth movement; based on worldly management principles on how to organize and fill a church up with lots of people. The pastor is not the CEO (Chief Executive Officer), and neither are any of you. The church is not a business. The church is a place of the foolishness of the cross. [Go back and read the notes on Session 4 and 5, or watch the teaching online]

**The Lord knoweth the thoughts of the wise that they are vain** (vs. 20). The worldly wisdom of man is empty and will not eternally save anyone.

### Verses 21-23 -

**Let no man glory in men** Don't boast about men (e.g. Apollos, Cephas, Paul); remember they are only men who plant and water (3:5-7). **For all things are yours**: this is rather unclear until the context is studied. In context, we see the church is built on the foundation of Jesus Christ (3:11), and we are the temple of God (3:16). Because of that, we are in Christ and Christ in us and we possess all things together as one body of Christ.

Which **things** are ours? **All are yours** no matter who, what, when, or where we may find ourselves, when we are one in Christ, as his body, **ye are Christ's; and Christ is God's**. And we will discover more of what that means as we move along.

The foundation of our church is Christ. Let's pray for one another and build on Him this week.