

BUILDING FOR GOD

1 Corinthians 3:10-17

Paul planted the young Church in Corinth. They were rich in their spiritual experience. Paul moved on in his missionary travels and others came to minister to the Corinthians. Divisions arose through factions following different teachers and apostles and Paul's apostolic authority was questioned (1:10f). Spiritual pride began to affect them (2:1f) and they were not maturing in their faith (3:1f).

The foundations of their faith needed strengthening – so Paul as a way of teaching them introduces the analogy of the church as a building. He begins by reminding them of his apostolic authority and the foundational part he played in their early church life – as 'an expert builder' (3:10). But he quickly points to Jesus as the true foundation of the Church.

THE IMPORTANCE OF GOOD FOUNDATIONS

Jesus the Cornerstone

This theme is also used by Paul in Ephesians (2:20-22) as well as by St Peter (1 Pet 2:6) and both use the Old Testament language of the Messiah as the 'Cornerstone' and 'capstone' (Ps 118 and Isaiah 28). The gospel writers record Jesus taking this for himself (Matt 21:42). The foundation of Christianity is Jesus Christ himself – he is the Cornerstone and the Capstone on which all stands – under whose authority all else falls. He is the Lord of his church, and because of that we can be sure of our faith – we can stand on solid ground – we can build our lives confidently upon him.

Apostolic Authority – the Word of God

While Jesus is 'The Foundation' the teaching of the Apostles was also foundational in the life of the church – being built upon the teaching of Jesus. Therefore, Paul is able to say he laid a foundation' (3:10) – because of his apostolic authority. The Apostolic teaching was the basis upon which the early Church was built – and became Holy Scripture. In Acts we read how the first thing the early church did was to 'devote themselves to the Apostles teaching' (Acts 2:42). We see how they loved God's word and put themselves under its authority. To build strong churches and Christian lives we need to follow the Architect's instructions – the word of God which is the 'plumb-line' by which we build.

AN EDIFYING BUILDING FOR GOD'S GLORY

We as the church now continue to build upon the foundation of Jesus the Cornerstone and the apostolic teaching, but we must take care (3:12-15). Good foundations can produce good strong buildings – but that depends upon the materials used to build.

Use Good Building Materials

The emphasis in these verses is on what is durable, beautiful and costly - a measure of how we invest in building for God. As 'good builders for God' we are to seek to make a building which is worthy of the foundation. This will be tested and will be revealed at the judgement.

We are the Building

Don't you know that you yourselves are a temple of God? (3:16). 'God's temple is sacred and you are that temple' (3:17). Within these verses we find both corporate and individual dimensions. The Church of Corinth is the temple of God – the individual believer is God's temple. The Spirit is at work in us as his church, and in you and me as a disciple of Jesus - and that should be reflected in Christ-like character within the church and within the individual believer – edifying to God.

QUESTIONS

1. In which ways can you say you are building on good foundations in relation to the Lordship of Jesus Christ and his word? In which ways do you think we can build on other people or foundations apart from Christ?
2. How would you say your church is an edifying building for God, and what may be in danger of testing? In the building of your Christian life is there anything which is displeasing to the Lord or needs cleansing, restoration or renewal by his Spirit?

Revd Peter Cook (Christ Church Bangkok)

25/5/08

Westside Anglican Church, St Andrews Cathedral