



Well we are working through the book of 1 Corinthians and we are in the middle of chapter 3 so open there with me if you would.

And if you remember from last week, Paul is speaking of this mystery of how God uses ordinary people to plant spiritual seeds. And we learned that our job as tools is to plant the seed and it's God's job to do the miracle of growth.

One of the things that analogy teaches us is that we have serious limits. A rake has power to scrape the soil, but it doesn't have any power to transfer DNA, it can't cause the embryo to develop, it can't do photosynthesis. The rake's part is important but there are severe limits to what the rake can do. Compared to the miracle of life, the job of the rake is not that impressive. It's like the on/off switch on a nuclear reactor. I mean you need one, but it's not really that impressive.

And we talked about last week how the Corinthians were over-inflating the value of the rake and worse yet, assessing the value of

the rakes using all the wrong metrics. They were into rake packaging and rake handles decorated with glitter and stickers. And Paul says, no, the power is in God, not men. The wisdom is in God, not men. So that was last week. It was an agricultural metaphor.

Now he's going to go a different direction. He's going to switch metaphors from a field with seeds to a building. And the reason he changes metaphors is because this metaphor can do something the other metaphor can't. The last metaphor teaches us our place as a tool in God's garden. This metaphor is going to teach us the consequence if we think we know better than God how to garden. This metaphor is going to teach us the danger of trying to go outside of God's design.

- What happens when you use the wrong metric?
- What happens when you build the church on man's wisdom and stickers and glitter?
- What happens if you talk about Christ and include Christ but don't make it mainly about Christ.

So let's read the follow passage as he changes the metaphor from seeds in a field to stones in a building.

1 Corinthians 3:9-15, For we are God's fellow workers. You are God's field, God's building. According to the grace of God given to me, like a skilled master builder I laid a foundation, and someone else is building upon it. Let each one take care how he builds upon it. For no one can lay a foundation other than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ.

Last week we did 3 principles of gardening and so this week we'll change the analogy along with Paul.

3 PRINCIPLES OF BUILDING

1. Walls Must Follow the Foundation

So the whole idea here is that God wants us to build the church according to his plan. That's the big picture for all three of the points

as you'll see shortly.

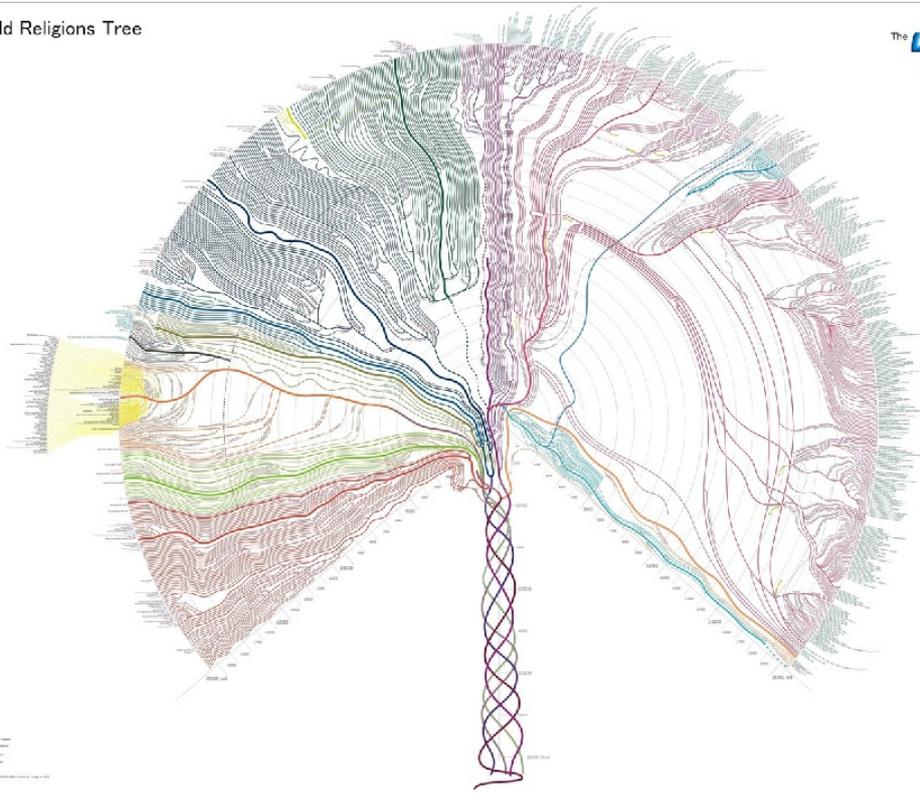
And this first point has to do with making sure the structure is the right shape. Following the plan means following the shape. The walls must follow the foundation. When a framer shows up to the job site, it doesn't matter one bit if he likes modern architecture, classical, mid-century modern, high ceilings, low ceilings. His job is to follow the plans. You do it exactly like the plans say. Don't question anything. Just do what it says.

And it's pretty hard to not follow the plans honestly because the foundation gives you a perfect outline of where the walls should go. You can't go jet off into the dirt and claim you got confused on the drawings. I mean the foundation is right there. You build the wall on top of that hard gray thing.

And what is the foundation according to Paul. The foundation is Jesus Christ. And what is the wall? The wall is God's church. So the church is built on Jesus Christ.

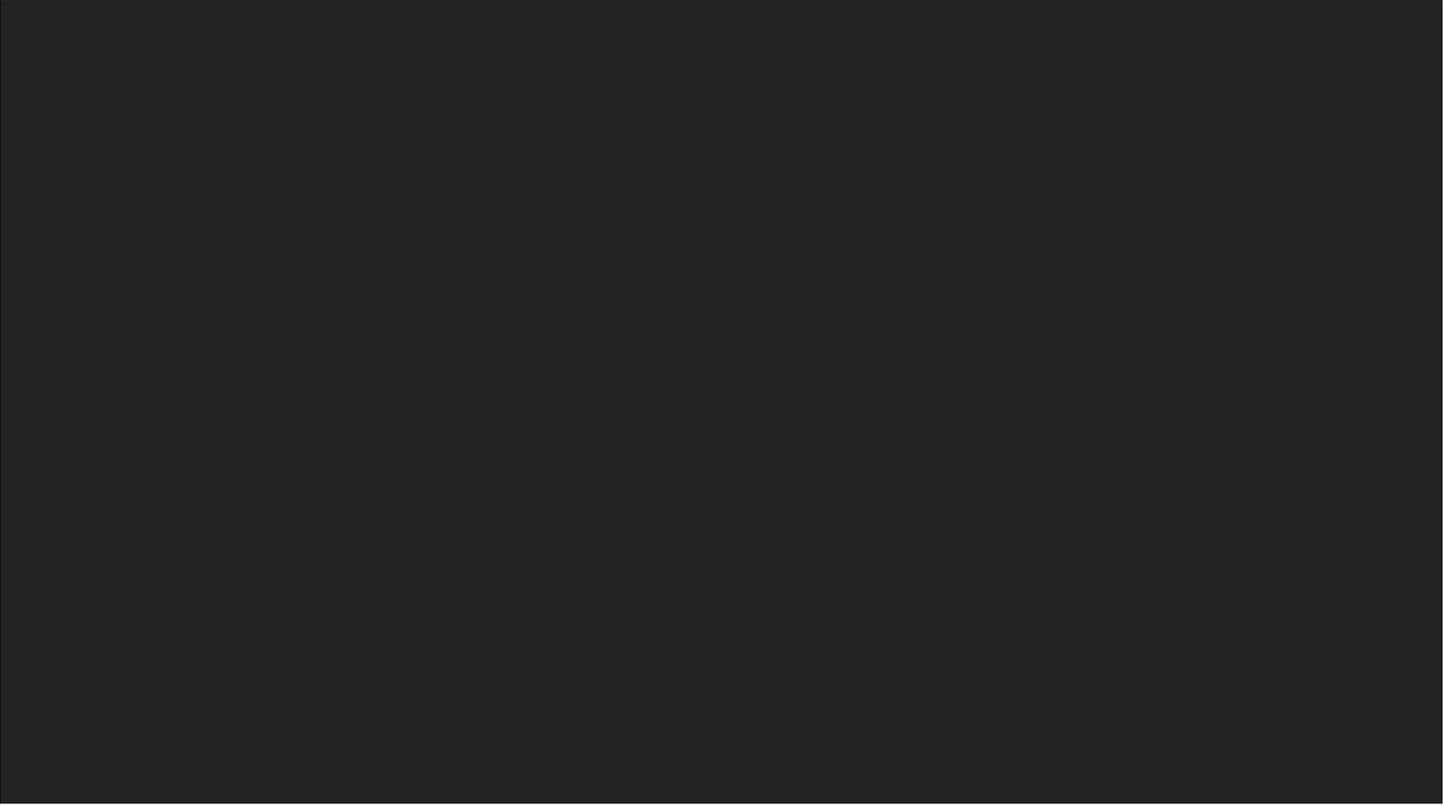
Every structure we build in the church needs to be about Jesus. It needs to in some way display or showcase the character of Jesus. It needs to remind people of Jesus' work, illuminate his love, display his wisdom. Every structure of the church needs to follow the outline of who Jesus is.

Now almost immediately here, we have a great application. Just knowing that this is what the church should be really helps us interpret the myriads of organizations that claim the name of Christ, but aren't doing this. . This is a pretty popular info graphic that shows the religions of the world.



And I know you can't see anything on it but what you are looking at here is the trunk of the major religions of the world that begin to break off into all the religions of the world. You have eastern religions, Islam, Christianity, etc. Now everything in the red, basically everything on the right half of this tree is splinters of Christianity.

I'll zoom in a bit so you can see what it looks like up close:



It's a great thing to study. Super instructive on where all the religions came from. I really like this chart. Now the person who made this was an atheist. And it's posted again and again on atheists websites. And you can probably guess how this is used.

Really, you are claiming your little sect of Christianity, your one little ghetto, your denomination somehow got it right and everyone else is in error? Look at all the religions of the world. There is no ultimate truth.

This is a fair question but it is not a hard question to answer. This should have zero threat to any Christian. I don't care what any PERSON says Christianity is. The church is built on the foundation of Jesus Christ. The degree to which it aligns with Jesus Christ, is the degree to which it is correct. End of story. There is a way to judge it. This guy over here can claim to be the church, but if it's not built on the foundation of Christ, that's fine but he's not the church. We don't have multiple sources of truth. We have one. Christians can disagree on what that source says, but there's only one source.

The source is the anchor.

I watched a documentary recently on the KG. Pretty nerdy, I know. But it was really interesting. Locked in this chamber near Paris is this platinum-iridium alloy that is official KG of the world. Whatever that thing weighs, all other things that claim to be kg, have to come into conformity to it. You could say this feather weighs a KG all you want, but your words don't make it a KG. The KG in the closet doesn't care about the feather. It's mere existence judges everything else.

And that is how the church works. How closely a church conforms to the foundational shape of Jesus Christ will determine how much of a church it is.

Just because someone uses the source to justify their idea does not mean it conforms to the shape. Abuses of this are about as old as the sun. This happens in politics all the time. We have political groups that are on opposite sides of an issue defending themselves from the same source. Take gun control. The founders of the constitution would have wanted us to have AK47s to defend ourselves. And so you end up having a white supremacy group in northern Idaho with fully automatic weapons who trace their legitimacy back to the founding fathers. Another group also points to the founding fathers original intent and comes to the opposite conclusion that we should restrict firearms because the nature of what it means to defend yourself against the government has changed so drastically. Back then you could have guns and the government could have gun so the playing field was equal. But not you can have guns and the government can have battleships and destroyers and tanks and nuclear weapons. Things have changed so now a different principle of the founding fathers is used to defend

their position. So you have opposite camps using the same source.

Does that mean that there's no way to determine what the founding fathers thought about the right to bear arms? Of course not. You can go right back to the source and read it. And for sure whatever they say will need to be applied to our culture, and there will be differences of opinion, but there will be some concrete words that have meaning. And we will have to think about how accurately any group is applying that meaning. It's not like one idea is equally as valid as the next. We can compare ideas to the source and see how reasonably they align.

People often discredit Christianity because of the crusades or the Salem witch trials or even associate Christianity with the Holocaust because of Martin Luther's anti-semitism. But it can be shown in two seconds that these horrible events in history are sinful men twisting the words of Christ or injecting their own ideas into the text or horribly blind to their own biases. This is men driven by greed or power or lust and using religion to their advantage. They are building the church on a different foundation. This is clearly, most definitely not what Jesus Christ taught. All you have to do is open your Bible and read what Jesus taught.

The churches ONE foundation is Jesus Christ our Lord.

Our faith does not evolve. This is why Christianity is under such severe attack right now because culture wants us to evolve. The culture wants us to find some room in our religion for Gay marriage or abortion. Can't you get rid of that outmoded idea of hell or sacrifice? That's kind of embarrassing in our day of satellites and rockets. But we have to say, "Listen, we are not trying to be difficult, we must take the historic position of the church on all these issues.

Why? Because the historic position of the church is built upon the foundation of Jesus Christ. So when you ask us to change our view on gay marriage or abortion, you probably don't realize what you are asking. To ask us to change our position is to ask us to build upon another foundation which is to ask us to abandon our faith all together and we can't do that. What seems like a small change to you is no small change.

Now in the context, here's why this is important. What are these Corinthian believers tempted to build the church on? Something other than Jesus Christ. They want to build the church on the wisdom of men the power of men the personality of men, the charisma of men, glitter and stickers.

Now they are okay with Jesus as part of their structure. They certainly even like the idea of including him! They just want to include him where they see fit. They don't like being restricted to the outline of just Jesus.

Sure we'll have Jesus but we need to introduce him in ways that aren't embarrassing or offensive. So we will turn him on or off as we see fit.

Now here's why the building analogy here is so helpful in that particular issue. The key idea in a foundation has to do with order that produces stability. If you put the studs down right into the earth and then pour the foundation on top of the studs, that will produce a worthless structure. All the same materials are there. Everything is exactly the same except for the order. And you can see the absurdity of that.

So why is it that we put concrete first? What about concrete makes

it better to be first? It's harder. It's heavier. It resists the forces of nature that try to erode it. There are certain properties of concrete that make it a good foundation. We use concrete precisely because it has those properties.

And so when it comes to building the church, all those same principles apply.

- Jesus Christ is hard, heavy, it resists culture, it resists decay.
- The fads of human wisdom cannot stand the test of time. (It's just a pine stud)
- The trends of culture can't span across the breadth of people groups and linguistic differences.
- Christianity works in all nations and all people groups in all points of history because it's built on the foundation of Jesus Christ.

Because who Jesus is, what he represents, the core issues he addresses are so heavy, so weighty, so hard, no culture can erode them or claim that what he wants to address is irrelevant.

Every church for sure is going to look different. But these various cultural expressions take the shape of the foundation of Christ. We don't lay out the structure according to what our culture dictates and then somehow try to hack in whatever part of Jesus happens to fit.

So again, the whole idea here is that God wants us to build the church according to his plan. And this first point has to do with making sure the structure is the right shape. Following the plan means following the shape. But it also means building with the right materials. Every set of plans has a materials list. And those are not optional. They are engineered. So here's the second principle of building.

3 PRINCIPLES OF BUILDING

1. Walls Must Follow the Foundation
2. Walls Built with Paper Mache Fail Inspection

Look at verse 12

Now if anyone builds on the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw - each one's work will become manifest, for the Day will disclose it, because it will be revealed by fire, and the fire will test what sort of work each one has done.

Now I was always taught growing up that this verse had to do with how we lived our lives as individuals. There are things you do in your life that have great meaning (reading your Bible, praying, going

to church, fellowship, evangelism) and then other things you do are meaningless (brushing your teeth, playing dumb games on your phone, mowing your grass). So the meaningful stuff is the gold, silver, precious stones and the grass mowing and angry birds is wood, hay and stubble. And at the end of your life the judgment will burn away the meaningless activity and the meaningful activity will be preserved.

Now I don't have a problem with that interpretation, in fact some of our application will be centered around that interpretation, but I think it's super important to pull in the context. This is not talking about how individuals go about using their time. It's talking about what the church is built upon. It's talking about those things you do explicitly in the name of Christ. Okay, we're done eating and showering and mowing the grass. Now it's time to build the church. It's time to present the church to the world. Whatever you do in that moment is what Paul is talking about. Those activities done in the name of Christ will be separated into gold, silver and precious stones, and wood, hay, stubble.

That has a different slant doesn't it. It forces us to ask the question, "When it comes to the church, what do I want people to see?" When I open my mouth to share what the church is about, "What comes out?" You see, perhaps what I want them to see, perhaps what I want the church to be about is something that will be burned up in the end.

- What do we as a church value?
- What do we as a church work to uphold and defend.
- What ruffles our feathers?
- What will we fight for?
- How will the church spend it's money?
- How will the church spend it's time?

- What programs will it put in place and why?
- What will the church be known for?

We will build the church with those materials. And those materials will be tested.

The thought here is that you can build a structure on top of the foundation that has the right shape but built from the wrong materials. And what that does is creates a shell that looks good. From the outside, it looks exactly like a church.

After all, every church has to have those things.

- You need a place to meet.
- You need some technology solutions
- You need some organization
- You need some instruments to sing with
- You need a screen for some words.
- You need a website
- These days you'll probably incorporate some media here and there.

But what is it ABOUT.

There really isn't a way to distinguish it based on the shape of things. It uses all the right words, it's configured properly, but the material choices will be revealed when it is tested.

How is it tested? Well when you read this passage we get this image of testing through fire, and the obvious thing that comes to mind is final judgment which of course is the main thing in view here. But I don't think we need to limit it to just that. The church is tested all the time.

The church is being tested and will continue to be tested. Now there are three ways in which the church will be tested.

1. By Experience

Here's what I mean by this. All men all the time are testing different ideas. You say this Bible is important. Let me try out some of the ideas in it. Does it have something I need? That's a test. And the great questions of humanity are tossed on this structure. Can it hold the weight? Can the church bear up under the problem of evil? Can the church tell me what the good life really looks like? What's going to make me happy? Can the church give me a reason why I should go on living? Can the church explain love or art? What does the church have to say about chaos?

It takes serious engineering to develop a structure that can stand up under the weight of all those questions. The world has tried for thousands of years to build a structure that can stand up to those pressures.

If the church is built on stickers and glitter it won't stand. What is the church about? Lights and sound and friends and social media and fun circles and good times with friends. That won't stand. It won't pass the test. The world has versions of all that and they'll look at the church and say, "I've tried all that.

- Worship is just the Christian version of a U2 concert.
- Preaching is just a Christian version of a TED talk.
- Small groups are just Christian versions of support groups.

You have nothing unique to offer. I've tried all those things. Do you see that we absolutely must built with materials more substantial than these?

2. By Trials

So the church will be tested by men's experience, but it will also be tested by trials. Fire in the Bible often times refers to trials.

1 Peter 1:7, In this you rejoice, though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials, so that the tested genuineness of your faith - more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire - may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ.

And so here the idea is, when a trial comes, is anything left that is meaningful? What happens when it all gets stripped away? Let's say that Idaho takes away the tax status for 501c3's and now we have to pay an annual property tax on a property worth 3.5 million. Overnight we can't afford to keep the building. What happens if we can't gather in large numbers and we can't sing with full bands and have to sing acapella or with an out of tune 3 string guitars and there's no VBS or formal children's ministry. Is there something left to sustain you? Is there a substance beneath the exterior? Or is the church just a bunch of straw that gets burned away when a match strikes? Is there something at the heart that flames can't destroy? Is there something so immaterial, and yet so solid, that no torture, no evil can get to it? Nothing can strip it clean from your soul?

These are good tests!

- Is the church built upon something that gives men real answers to their questions, not just a Christianized version of what the world has to offer.
- Will the church continue to prosper under persecution?

But there is coming a test that matters far, far more than any of these human tests. Eventually God himself will test the church.

3. By God Himself

3 PRINCIPLES OF BUILDING

1. Walls Must Follow the Foundation
2. Walls Built with Paper Mache Fail Inspection
3. Builders who Don't Follow Plans Don't Get Paid

This point comes from verse 14 and 15

1 Corinthians 3:14-15, If the work that anyone has built on the foundation survives, he will receive a reward. If anyone's work is burned up, he will suffer loss, though he himself will be saved, but only as through fire. If anyone's work is burned up, he will suffer loss, though he himself will be saved, but only as through fire.

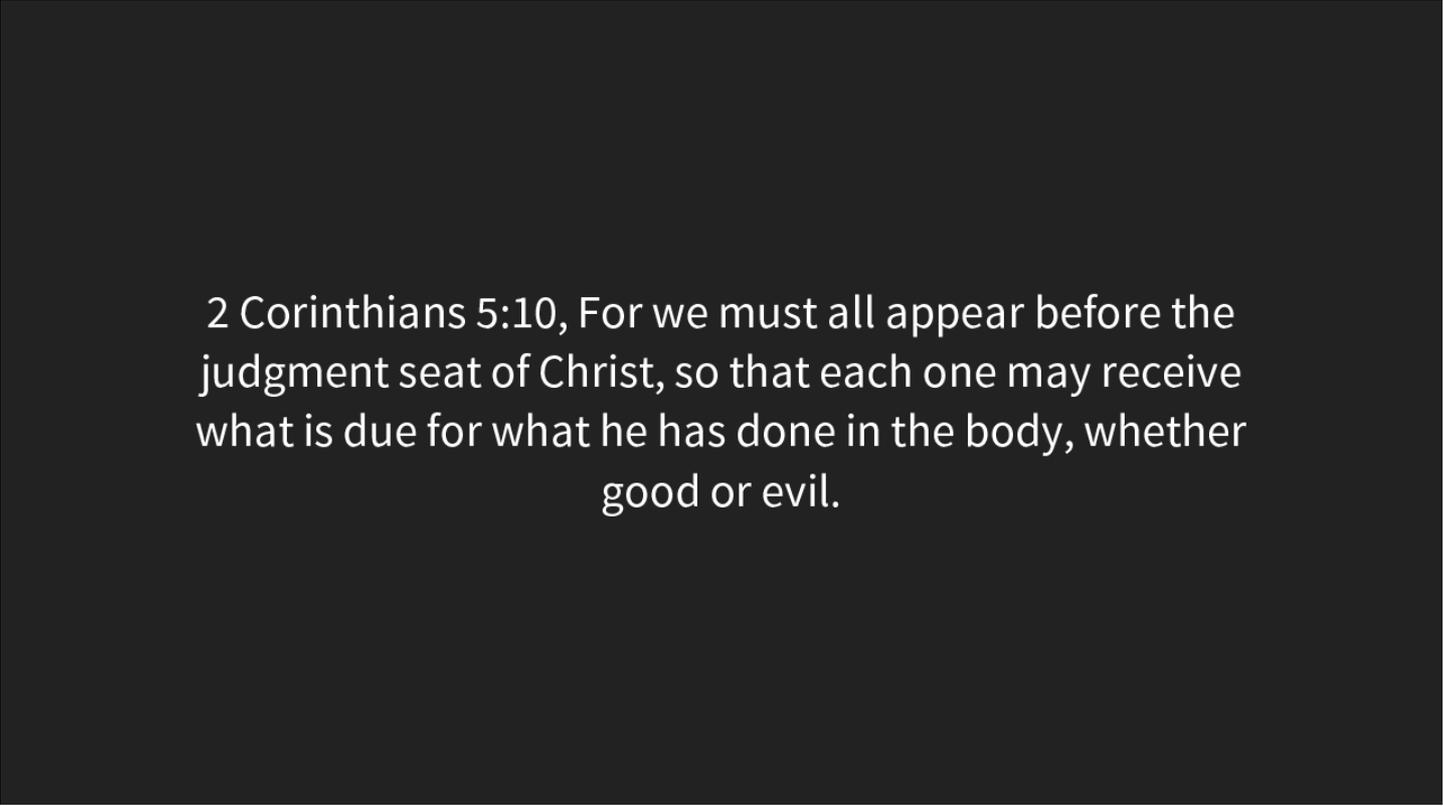
Judgment is very frequently pictured as fire even in the OT. There's a similar text in Malachi that uses very similar imagery. Speaking of God's final judgment the prophet says,

Malachi 4:1-2, "For behold, the day is coming, burning like an oven, when all the arrogant and all evildoers will be stubble. The day that is coming shall set them ablaze, says the LORD of hosts, so that it will leave them neither root nor branch. But for you who fear my name, the sun of righteousness shall rise with healing in its wings.

You have that image of field stubble being consumed. But the way

Paul uses the image of fire here is slightly different. He's not talking about separating believers from unbelievers as in the Malachi passage. He's talking about the fire of judgment separating the kinds of things the church was built upon. And once the fire has done it's work and the smoke clears, there will either be pain as the one being judged looks and see how much is lost or he will see what remains and will be rewarded.

And this is an interesting concept that causes a lot of confusion. Really, believers will be judged for their works? The Bible says yes.



2 Corinthians 5:10, For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive what is due for what he has done in the body, whether good or evil.

Now for many this idea of reward vs suffering loss creates difficulties because we wonder how this fits into the idea that we are justified by faith. How is it that faith, NOT WORKS, justifies us in the eyes of God and yet we can still have so many passages in the Bible that talk about rewards for the WORK we do?

Here's the simplest way to say it. While it is true that anyone who believes in Jesus already has been justified by Faith and will not

experience condemnation, nevertheless, the Bible still teaches that our works will be judged and we will be either discarded as worthless or rewarded.

Allow both those truths to impact you. Both are true. Allow them both to influence you. Which of those do you need to hear today? Perhaps you are uncertain of your salvation because you feel like your sin has put you outside the reach of God. You need to hear Romans 8:1 that there is no condemnation in Christ Jesus. Your standing before God is based on the shed blood of Jesus. Your performance does not give you entrance into heaven. Rest in that. Rejoice in that. Praise him for that.

Others of you perhaps are confident in your standing before Christ and think that the way you spend your time and money on doesn't matter and what you choose to love in this life has no consequence. It does matter. You need to be reminded that judgment is coming for you. You will give an account. Actual judgment is intended to motivate you to not waste your life. Those words have meaning. That is for you.

So often we try to double dip. We try to get the best of both worlds.

You might say to yourself, "Self, here's what I want. I want to find some way I can indulge in all the love and pleasure of the flesh, to be angry when I feel like it, to enjoy all that materialism has to offer, and at the same time, to have a good standing in the church, to experience Christian joy, to really have the good feeling of altruism as I give and contribute.

Isn't that what you want? Of course you do! I know it is; I do too. But do you see what the apostle is saying? It is one or the other.

If you are not building with gold, silver and precious stones, you are building with wood, hay and stubble. There are no other choices. There is nothing in between. It is one or the other -- either the foolishness of man or the wisdom of God. That is why Paul says you must "take care" how you build in the church. What are you really building your life on. Look at how you spend your time? What is it? What are you REALLY building it on. Paul gives us as the motivation for this the fact that examination day is coming.

What are we building with? One or the other. If it is good it will endure; it will stand the test, and we will be given a reward. That's crazy!

The Reward

Now what is the reward? The Scriptures are not clear on this and but we get glimpses and hints and they are fun to think about.

1 Thessalonians 2:19"20, For what is our hope or joy or crown of boasting before our Lord Jesus at his coming? Is it not you? For you are our glory and joy.

Whatever our reward is, it will certainly include this. It will be joy that

you have spent your life in a meaningful way.

What happens when a team wins the superbowl? The team goes nuts. They jump up and down and scream and jump ontop of one anothers backs! All that work paid off. They are so glad they put in the effort and did their best.

And how many other athletes, those guys who could have been, they had all the potential. They had the genetic gift, but they didn't apply themselves. Isn't there a sense in which they suffered loss.

I spent a lot of time this week thinking about that phrase suffer loss. I hate suffering loss. I like gain. I like reaping the investments of my labor. I hate suffering loss. So when the Bible tells me, that part of judgment is suffering loss, it really got my attention.

Allow that to be truly motivating for you. There is a way in which you can be in heaven and suffer loss.

Let's be balanced here. Keep in mind, all of us shall have some of both in our lives. There is nobody who is a Christian who will not have some degree of gold, silver and precious stones and some amount of wood, hay and stubble.

What is your life going to count for? That is the question. Every one of us here is investing his life in something. You cannot live without making an investment.

What is it in? Will it be permanent? Will it abide? Will it stand the test? In the great day when all the universe sees things the way they are, will you be filled with joy that your life was invested in what stood the test and contributed to the glory of the Lord himself?

I know this may make some uncomfortable. Why do we have to talk like this? The Scriptures teach us that we have some choice in this matter. How are you going to chose to live your life?