

Pastor Jim Lloyd

Date: July 23, 2023

Title: BUILDING TOGETHER

Text: 1 Corinthians 3:10-17

Any builders in the house? I believe any builder will tell you that your building has a better chance of withstanding the elements IF you build it to code. (As I understand it, building codes are meant to protect the buyer or owner of a home or building.) The same is true in anyone's life. If you build your life according to code, you have a greater chance – in fact, I'll say you have a *guarantee* – that if you build your life according to code, you will outlive and outlast whatever havoc the world might bring your way. AND... You can be sure havoc will happen; It happens to everyone. BUT... If your life is built *according to code* – according to GOD'S STANDARD – you will endure, all the way to eternity. What do I mean when I say *built according to code*? Paul talks about this in today's text.

Let's read the text and look for participants in the building process. 1 Corinthians 3:10-27 (NIV84) - ¹⁰*“By the grace God has given me, I laid a foundation as an expert builder, and someone else is building on it. But each one should be careful how he builds. ¹¹For no one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ. ¹²If any man builds on this foundation using gold, silver, costly stones, wood, hay or straw, ¹³his work will be shown for what it is, because the Day will bring it to light. It will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test the quality of each man's work. ¹⁴If what he has built survives, he will receive his reward. ¹⁵If it is burned up, he will suffer loss; he himself will be saved, but only as one escaping through the flames. ¹⁶Don't you know that you yourselves are God's temple and that God's Spirit lives in you? ¹⁷If anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy him; for God's temple is sacred, and you are that temple.”*

There's PAUL – the original planter of the church in Corinth. We see him as foreman or the “*expert or wise master builder*” (3:10). However, neither the wisdom nor the skill, neither the plan nor the resources for building the foundation of the church, had come from Paul. Everything came from GOD. In verse 10 when Paul says someone else is building on it – that would include the apostles. In verse 12, when it says, “*If any man builds on this foundation using gold, silver, costly stones, wood, hay or straw...*,” Paul is speaking to the Corinthians and US.

We're several weeks into 1 Corinthians. 1 Corinthians is pretty much Good News for the Not So Good. Pastor Norm told us Wednesday that God uses whoever is available. Many times, God doesn't have much to work with. These Corinthians presented many a challenge, yet Paul repeats that they are a work in progress. As we've seen in weeks past, and will certainly see more in the weeks to come, the first century church of Corinth was, in many ways, like the 21st century church in America: disjointed and divided, lacking a sense of purpose and direction, they missed the point more than they got the point, they were lenient when they should be strict, inflexible when they should be tolerant, focused on themselves when they should be focused on the needs of others, living for themselves when THEY SHOULD be living for Christ. They were a bit of a mess, but despite all these deficiencies and defects, Paul tells them again and again that they are a unique work of God – a work in progress that He will see through to completion. He says it again in today's text.

In the final phrase of last week's text he said, “*YOU ARE GOD'S BUILDING*” (1 Corinthians 3:9). In this week's text he expands on that metaphor, and then he says, “*You are God's temple and God dwells in your midst*” (v. 16). I'm rather sure he would say the same thing to us. Every church has their problems – their defects and deficiencies – just as every family has problems and every Christian has problems, because none of us are perfect and we all still struggle with sin. BUT... As GOD'S PEOPLE, we are His BUILDING, His TEMPLE. AND... When we make sure that we build this building – I'm talking about building our lives together – when we build this building according to code, we are guaranteed to stand strong.

So, what's the building code? What is the construction standard? Here are three requirements that EVERY church and EVERY Christian must consider to build a life that lasts for all eternity:

1. MAKE SURE THE FOUNDATION IS SURE. An evangelist told about a time he was giving a series of lectures in Columbus, Ohio. The meeting hall was close to the Wexner Art Center, a popular gallery located on the Ohio State campus. (Diane and I are heading to that area next Monday for General Council.) One day as they passed the building, which was brand new at the time, his guide said that the art center was designed with “a post-modernist view of reality.” The evangelist asked what he meant. The guide said, “The building has no pattern. There are staircases that lead to nothing. There are standing pillars that support nothing. The architect designed the building to reflect the random, meaningless, and often absurd nature of life.” The evangelist then asked the man, “Did they use this same philosophy of design when they were building the FOUNDATION?” The man laughed and said, “Of course not. You can’t do that with a foundation.” If you build your existence on the idea that life is random and meaningless, guess what your life will become? Random and meaningless! Unstable in every way. Subject to the whim of the wind. I trust we all know how essential the foundation is to any building. A proper foundation does more than just hold the house above ground. It also keeps out moisture, insulates against the cold, and resists the movement of the earth around it. And ... According to the guy on *This Old House*, a good foundation should last forever. Without a good foundation, he said, you’re sunk. A foundation must be strong enough to hold a tremendous weight. The average house today weighs between 80,000 and 160,000 pounds or 50 some tons. So, at the very least, a house’s foundation has to be sturdy enough to withstand the weight of 50 to 80 tons. Do you have any idea how much 50 tons is? Some of you might say, “Yes, I do have an idea. 50 tons is almost the total weight of my problems.” Our worries do weigh us down, no doubt about it. If your foundation isn’t sure and secure, life’s burdens can bury you. Without a good foundation, we’re sunk. What’s the foundation we’re to build upon? ¹⁰*“By the grace God has given me, I laid a foundation as an expert builder, and someone else is building on it. But each one should be careful how he builds. ¹¹For no one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ.”* If your life is built on anything other than your relationship with Jesus Christ, you’re susceptible to any storm that comes your way. HOW do you know which foundation your life is built upon? Where do you turn when the wind begins to blow or when trouble raises its ugly head? Some turn to some kind of substance to take the edge off. Some seek refuge in a meaningless relationship. Some just give in to their rage. Some surrender to despair. If, instead, you will turn to Christ during difficult times – allow Him to be the foundation of your life – you will stand strong. As the Apostle Peter said, *“See I lay a stone in Zion, a chosen and precious cornerstone, and the one who trusts in him will never be put to shame”* (1 Peter 2:6). This is why Jesus said, *“Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house; yet it did not fall, because it had its foundation on the rock”* (Matthew 7:24-25). For your life to be God’s building, as Paul says, make sure your foundation is sure; make sure your life is built on Jesus Christ. (Here Pastor Jim used a large *Jenga* -wood blocks – set as an illustration.) The most vulnerable place is the foundation. The foundation is that which everything else rests on. That’s the first code requirement. Make sure your foundation is sure. Here’s the second.

2. LET’S BUILD OUR LIVES TOGETHER WITH THE VERY BEST MATERIALS. ¹²*If any man builds on this foundation using gold, silver, costly stones, wood, hay or straw, ¹³his work will be shown for what it is, because the Day will bring it to light. It will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test the quality of each man’s work. ¹⁴If what he has built survives, he will receive his reward. ¹⁵If it is burned up, he will suffer loss; he himself will be saved, but only as one escaping through the flames.* In this section, Paul is talking about the lasting value of a person’s ministry, and the quality of their work. The work of some is like gold and silver and precious stones. The work of others is like wood, hay, and straw. And... He says that our work will be tested by FIRE ... and on the final day the results of the test will come in. He’s not saying that at the end of your life you will suddenly go through a fire. Here LIFE is the fire. We all go through the fire in various times, and the fire reveals – on that final day – what will survive the flames and what will succumb to the flames. This applies not only to those who are in “the professional ministry,” it applies to everyone of us, because we all contribute to the construction of the lives of those around us. PARENTS, you are building into the lives of your children. What

you teach them will either be gold and silver, or... It will prove to be kindling for the fire. FRIENDS, you are building into the lives of your friends. You often have more influence in the lives of those close to you than do pastors and medical professionals. There are likely those who will listen to you before they listen to anyone else. This is why Howard Hendricks, who was a professor at Dallas Theological Seminary, once said, "Show me a man's closest companions, and I can make a fairly accurate guess as to what sort of man he is, as well as what sort of man he is likely to become." Every day we're building into the lives of others, and we're building either that which will last or that which is sure to burn. FARMER ILLUSTRATION – There was a farmer who grew excellent quality corn. Year after year he won the award for the best grown corn. One year a newspaper reporter interviewed him and learned something interesting about how he grew it. The reporter discovered that the farmer shared his seed corn with his neighbors. "How can you afford to share your best seed corn with your neighbors when they are entering corn in competition with yours each year?" the reporter asked. "Why sir," said the farmer, "Didn't you know? The wind picks up pollen from the ripening corn and swirls it from field to field. If my neighbors grow inferior corn, cross-pollination will steadily degrade the quality of my corn. If I am to grow good corn, I must help my neighbors grow good corn." So it is with our lives... Those who want to live meaningfully and well must help enrich the lives of others, for the value of a life is measured by the lives it touches. And those who choose to be happy must help others find happiness. The welfare of each is bound up with the welfare of all. When we offer words designed to strengthen, encourage, and comfort (1 Corinthians 14:3) we're building walls made of gold, walls that will survive the flames. As WE consider the construction materials we choose to work with, there are two areas we need that require our attention. We need to choose carefully THOSE WHO INFLUENCE THE DIRECTION OF OUR LIVES. We can't always control whose voice we'll hear. We CAN control whose voice we'll listen to, whose voice we'll heed, whose advice we'll consider, whose example we'll follow. When it comes to who will influence you, BE SELECTIVE, AND... When it comes to who YOU will influence, BE CAUTIOUS. Be aware of the lessons you teach with your words and your attitudes and your actions. And... Be aware that if these three aren't consistent with one another, you're building a straw house. As Albert Schweitzer said, "Example is not the main thing in influencing others. It is the only thing." If you want to be, as Paul said, God's building, you need to make sure you're using materials that are made to last – gold, silver, precious stones. Here's the third building code requirement.

3. RECOGNIZE THE SACRED NATURE OF THIS RELATIONSHIP. I'm talking about what we're doing right now and what we do every week: We WORSHIP together, we SERVE together, we LEARN together and GROW together and FELLOWSHIP together. We PRAY together. Paul says to the people in Corinth, "*Don't you know...*". By the way, Paul uses this phrase "*don't you know*" 10 times throughout this letter, and each time it is used in what could be considered a scolding manner. The Corinthians prided themselves in their knowledge, and so several times he says, in effect: "Don't you know this? Because you certainly should know it, but... You're acting as if you don't know it." "*Don't you know that you yourselves are God's temple and that God's Spirit lives in you?*" It's important to note that the word YOU is plural, not singular. The King James translates it "*ye.*" The NIV translates it "*you yourselves.*" In West Virginia we translate it "*y'all.*" He's saying, "Y'all are God's temple, and God's Spirit dwells in all y'all's midst." (That is, I submit, an accurate rendering of the Greek.) Paul is saying that we're not just a group of friends that get together and hang out every week or so. This is a SACRED relationship. Together we make up more than merely the sum of our parts. You can go to Lowe's and buy some wood, some nails, some sandpaper, and stain for maybe \$100 or so. If you know what you're doing, you can use those materials to build custom bookshelves that sell for thousands. That's the miracle of construction: the whole is worth more than the sum of its parts. The same could be said of the church. Individually we're just a scattered group of wayfaring strangers. Put us together, and we're the temple of God, and He dwells among us. I have a long history with this church. I first attended Marlowe AG some 65 years ago. Way back – way, way back – especially when we first moved into this building, I might get away with being a bit rambunctious downstairs, BUT... I dare not cut loose in the sanctuary – this room. This room was to be treated with the utmost reverence – and, of course, there's nothing wrong with teaching kids to be reverent. BUT... Let's not forget where the real sanctuary is – in THIS church, or ANY OTHER church. The real

sanctuary is whatever room we happen to be in together. Right now, it's this room. Just a little while ago, it was the foyer. Sometimes it's the fellowship hall or the ministry center. The sanctuary is NOT the building, it's the relationship we have with one another – our connection to one another. That's how sacred this fellowship is. In Arkansas, some vandals set fire to an old church and burned it to the ground. Here's the news clip. (Here Pastor showed a video.) The room where they worshipped was more than one hundred years old. Both the windows and the woodwork were amazing. This particular church was out in the middle of nowhere. The congregation had been dwindling for several years because the community itself was dwindling. Downtown was mostly empty storefronts and abandoned buildings. When this church fire took place, as stated, the same night two abandoned buildings were also burned. When the fire came, most folks assumed that permanent closure was the inevitable next step for this tiny church. As it turns out, the building that burned down was not actually the church, it was just where the church met. And so, the CHURCH CONTINUED. If what I read elsewhere was accurate, for a while they met in a borrowed room. Then they began to meet in the remodeled fellowship hall. Now, they're meeting in their new, recently built worship center. There's still about 10 of them, and they're still together. Neither a pandemic nor a fire could destroy this temple, because... the TEMPLE IS NOT BRICK AND MORTAR; IT IS FLESH AND BLOOD. Do you know what's worse than someone trying to destroy a church by burning it down? Someone trying to destroy a church by tearing its members apart. Someone trying to prevent worship from taking place, someone trying to prevent ministry from taking place, spiritual growth from taking place, fellowship from taking place. The person who does this puts themselves at great risk. Paul pulls no punches – *“If anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy him; for God's temple is sacred, and you are that temple.”* That's why we need to take seriously the sacred nature of this relationship. We cannot build our lives to code if we're being disruptive and divisive among God's people. This means that before you go into full-attack mode on someone who has made the egregious error of disagreeing with you, STOP! Remind yourself – of who YOU are, of who THEY are, AND... who WE ALL ARE TOGETHER: God's PEOPLE, God's TEMPLE.

CONCLUSION. We won't end the message today with Paul's dire warning. Instead, I want us to focus on the bold and beautiful promise contained in the final phrase in this section: *“...for God's temple is sacred, and you together [y'all is what he means to say] YOU TOGETHER ARE THAT TEMPLE, AND...”* That temple is built to last. Let me conclude with what some might call levity. A guy goes into Lowe's, walks up to the counter in the lumber section and says, “Do you have two-by-fours?” The clerk says, “Yes, we do.” The man says, “Okay, then, I need one hundred two-by-fours.” The clerk says, “I need to know how long you want them.” The man says, “I'm going to want them a long time. I'm building a house.” Together we make up God's building, and He plans to keep us for a long time. For eternity, actually. This building we're a part of – this sacred temple – is meant to last FOREVER. This is what the Apostle Peter said about us... *“...you also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ”* (1 Peter 2:5). This is God's standard of construction. We are His holy temple ... so let's build our lives together according to code.