Tested by Fire

1 Cor. 3:10-23

1 Corinthians is Paul's letter to the church in Corinth addressing errors and problems in the church. The first issue Paul addresses is the lack of unity in that church. Today we finish that part of Paul's letter.

We first look at:

I. The judgement of believers works. 3:10-17

In this section Paul transitions from the metaphor of farming to one of a building. Paul's specialty as a church planter was building firm foundations upon which others could build.

1 Corinthians 3:10, "By the grace God has given me, I laid a foundation as a wise builder, and someone else is building on it. But each one should build with care."

Paul simply did what God had called & equipped him to do. We too have been called and equipped to build things in God's kingdom. What has He called you to build?

1 Corinthians 3:11-12, "For no one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ. 12 If anyone builds on this foundation using gold, silver, costly stones, wood, hay or straw,"

Paul only laid the foundation; he was not the foundation. That was Jesus!

Churches get in trouble when they forget that it is Jesus upon which we are to build. Tradition is not Jesus. Our personal preferences are not the foundation. When they become the focus rather than Jesus, we deviate from our mission of building God's kingdom with establishing our kingdom.

The foundation must remain one thing: the gospel of Jesus Christ. It's about bringing people to salvation in Jesus, not tradition or preferences.

Are we building with Gold or straw? If we build on the gospel it's gold, if it's our preferences it's straw.

There are 3 ways in which we can measure what we are building to determine if we are building with precious metals and stone or with that which will burn away.

1. What are our motives?

For example, when we give out of obligation we are building with straw. When we live as a joyous giver we are building with gold.

2. How is our conduct?

When we deal with things in a good, kind way we are building with gold. When we deal with things poorly, we are building with straw.

3. How is our service?

We might be doing all kinds of good things, but if we are not doing things in our calling according to our giftedness, we are missing the higher calling.

The Holy Spirit isn't simply a tenant within us. He has a purpose not only to guide us into holy living, but He has equipped us to do great works for the kingdom and given us spiritual gifts to accomplish those works. Are you using your spiritual gifts?

1 Corinthians 3:13-17, "their 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 person's work. 14 If what has been built survives, the builder will receive a reward. 15 If it is burned up, the builder will suffer loss but yet will be saved—even though only as one escaping through the flames.

16 Don't you know that you yourselves are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in your midst? 17 If anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy that person; for God's temple is sacred, and you together are that temple."

There is a fire coming that will test what we have built. Are you ready for the fire?

If our motives, conduct and service have built something of gold we will receive a reward for our work.

If our motives, conduct and service have built something of straw we will simply watch it disappear like it was never there, no reward.

We are still saved, that is assured through the work of Jesus and the sealing of the Holy Spirit, but we will not receive the potential rewards that God has equipped us to earn.

You work hard; don't let it go up in smoke. Build with gold!

In verse 17 it describes this: “If anyone destroys God’s temple, God will destroy that person.” This describes the person who destroys God’s temple and the way a human does that is by never letting Jesus in.

If you have never let Jesus into your life, you are destroying the temple build for the Holy Spirit to live in you. Don’t miss out on the reward, don’t miss out on eternal life with our Heavenly Father. Ask Jesus to come in.

II. We eliminate division with the proper perspective. 3:18-23

There are 4 proper views we need to have. They are:

1. The proper view of ourselves.

1 Corinthians 3:18-20, “Do not deceive yourselves. If any of you think you are wise by the standards of this age, you should become “fools” so that you may become wise. 19 For the wisdom of this world is foolishness in God’s sight. As it is written: “He catches the wise in their craftiness”; 20 and again, “The Lord knows that the thoughts of the wise are futile.”

Here we are again, man’s wisdom is foolishness compared to the wisdom of God.

The Greek word for foolishness here is the root word for our word for ‘moron.’ Our greatest wisdom is moronic before God. Do we get this church? You have heard that father knows best, well, I say God the Father knows best!

Need more evidence? Check this out: The galaxy is so big it takes light 200,000 years to cross it and that is only 1 galaxy. The observable universe contains an estimated 2 trillion galaxies.

Listen, my God made all of that by simply speaking them into existence. Can you speak 1 simple speck of dirt into existence? Come on, just 1 little speck. God, 2 trillion galaxies, us? 1 little speck? Nope, 1 speck is too much for us, but not for our God.

When we finally learn God’s superiority and begin living like it, then we can see miraculous things.

We eliminate division when we realize how very big God is and how small we are. When we stop being impressed with our own wisdom and acknowledge God’s superiority we take a step toward healing the divisions in the church.

2. The proper view of others.

1 Corinthians 3:21-22a, “So then, no more boasting about human leaders! All things are yours, 22 whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas”

Paul is pointing toward men who are faithful to the gospel, and he tells the Corinthians that if they had obeyed their teachings there wouldn’t be divisions in their church.

We see this principle in:

Hebrews 13:7, “Remember your leaders, who spoke the word of God to you. Consider the outcome of their way of life and imitate their faith.”

Then 10 verses later:

Hebrews 13:17, “Have confidence in your leaders and submit to their authority, because they keep watch over you as those who must give an account. Do this so that their work will be a joy, not a burden, for that would be of no benefit to you.”

I kind of like that verse, joy, not a burden. Ok, let’s keep moving.

3. The proper view of possessions.

1 Corinthians 3:22b, “or the world or life or death or the present or the future—all are yours,”

Now, listen up here: All things are for our sake. Check out what Paul writes in his 2nd letter to the Corinthians:

2 Corinthians 4:15, “All this is for your benefit, so that the grace that is reaching more and more people may cause thanksgiving to overflow to the glory of God.”

All of this is for your benefit, all of it, all of it church.

Everything we have, everything we experience has a purpose.

Romans 8:28, “And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.”

This is God’s Word; do you believe it? Do you really believe it? Then we should live like it, we should worship like it, we should proclaim it from the mountain tops!

When this is our view there is no place for division.

4. The proper view of God.

1 Corinthians 3:23, “and you are of Christ, and Christ is of God.”

Did you follow this?

We belong to Christ; Christ belongs to God.
Therefore, we belong to God.

Jesus set the example of obedience and submission that we are to live by…with one another.

In closing let me remind you that in Jesus’ prayer for His disciples…us…in John 17 is that we all would be united as He and the Father are united. Will we be the answer to Jesus’ prayer or the stumbling block to it?

Prayer of unity!