

The church's one foundation

Mark 8:27-29, 1 Corinthians 3:9-17

February 11, 2018

I am going to read the scripture lesson once more, and I want you to listen carefully, because there will be a quiz! You may follow along if you would like on page 1372 in the Good News Bible, because this will be an open book quiz!

You are also God's building. Using the gift that God gave me, I did the work of an expert builder and laid the foundation, and someone else is building on it. But each of you must be careful how you build. For God has already placed Jesus Christ as the one and only foundation, and no other foundation can be laid. Some will use gold or silver or precious stones in building on the foundation; others will use wood or grass or straw. And the quality of each person's work will be seen when the Day of Christ exposes it. For on that Day fire will reveal everyone's work; the fire will test it and show its real quality. If what was built on the foundation survives the fire, the builder will receive a reward. But if your work is burnt up, then you will lose it; but you yourself will be saved, as if you had escaped through the fire.

Surely you know that you are God's temple and that God's Spirit lives in you! God will destroy anyone who destroys God's temple. For God's temple is holy, and you yourselves are his temple.

First question ...

You are God's building ...

When Paul writes, "You are God's building," who is "you?"

"You" are the people to whom Paul is writing. And who are the people to whom Paul is writing? Christians, followers of Jesus in Corinth, the people of the Corinthian congregation, the people of the Corinthian church.

"You" is the church. The church is God's building. And since you are a gathered congregation, since you are a church, "you" is you. You are God's building. This church, these gathered people, are God's building.

Next question ...

On what foundation is the church built?

On Jesus Christ. On Jesus the Messiah.

On what foundation is First Congregational United Church of Christ built? On Jesus Christ.

On what foundation is First United Methodist Church built? On Jesus Christ.

On what foundation is Sacred Heart Roman Catholic Church built? On Jesus Christ.

On what foundation is Amazing Love Burmese Church built? On Jesus Christ.

On what foundation is Christian Fellowship Missionary Baptist Church built? On Jesus Christ.

On what foundation is any church, of whatever sort, built? On Jesus Christ.

What does every church have in common? It is built on the foundation of Jesus Christ. "The church's one foundation is Jesus Christ her Lord."

The third question ...

Who laid the foundation?

Paul says he laid the foundation. But then he clarifies:

God has placed Jesus Christ as the one and only foundation, and no other foundation can be laid.

God laid the foundation. God did it, not us, and it cannot be undone. Can a church, any church, can our church, be built on a different foundation? No! "No other foundation can be laid."

Pay attention. This is important. Paul is stating a fact, not making an appeal. He is not saying to the church: "Make sure that you make Jesus Christ your foundation and nothing else." He is saying: "Jesus Christ is your foundation, the one and only foundation which God has laid and upon which you are built." As a seminary professor of mine liked to say, "The indicative precedes the imperative." The gospel is not about what we must do, but about what God has done. God has laid the foundation for the church, for any and every church, and that foundation is Jesus.

Paul makes this point to the people of the Corinthian congregation because they have become divided into factions, aligning themselves with one teacher or another, identifying themselves as one kind of Christian or another. "I follow Paul," say some. "I follow Apollos," say others.

"I am an evangelical," say some. "I am most certainly not an evangelical," say others.

"I am a congregationalist," say some. "I am catholic," say others.

"I am progressive," say some. "I am conservative," say others.

"I am pentecostal" say some. "I am traditional", say others.

"I am not one of them," say some. "And I am not one of them," say others.

We become so divided, we quarrel so much among ourselves, we are so disparate in our allegiances and our values and our priorities, that it is difficult to fathom how we can be called by the same name "Christian." But if we believe in Jesus -- if we believe in Jesus -- we are called by that name and we are all of us built on one and the same foundation, the one and only foundation that God has laid, Jesus Christ. This is who we are, and if we deny it or ignore it, if we deny or ignore that belonging to Jesus we belong also to each other, then what?

Next question ...

Who is building on the foundation?

All kinds of people. All kinds of different people in all kinds of different places, including us. We are building on the foundation.

Does it matter how we build? Of course, it does! Why? Didn't I tell you? This quiz has essay questions, too! Why does it matter how we build?

It matters because what we are building is God's temple, God's holy temple, the place where God may be found, the place where God's Spirit lives. "God's Spirit lives in you," Paul writes. And who is "you?" The church. The gathered community. God's Spirit does not live in us one by one by one, but in us together, as we worship and work and pray and be together. God's Spirit lives among us.

The church is holy, not because of how good we may or may not be, but because it is the place where God chooses to be present. So we must be careful how we build. We must take good care of God's temple, we must take good care of each other, because we are God's temple. We may be doing the building, but the building does not belong to us. The temple is God's. The building is God's. We are God's. We belong to God.

Last question ...

What's the point? What is the point of this scripture lesson? What do we need to hear?

Two things. First, be careful how you build. Day by day, Sunday by Sunday, decision by decision, action by action, relationship by relationship, we are building the church, we are building this church. What happens if we build well? God will be pleased and we will reap the reward of a job well done, the reward of a good and faithful servant. What happens if we do not build well? It may all be lost. If we do not build well, all our work may be lost.

Our work will be lost, but will we be lost? If we do not build well, will we be lost? This is the second and most important point of this scripture. This is gospel. The church's one foundation is Jesus Christ. Our foundation is Jesus Christ. Which means?

The quality of each person's work will be seen when the Day of Christ exposes it. For on that Day fire will reveal everyone's work; the fire will test it and show its real quality. If what was built on the foundation survives the fire, the builder will receive a reward. But if your work is burnt up, then you will lose it; but you yourself will be saved ...

You will be saved. We are built on a foundation that cannot be shaken. We are built on a foundation that cannot be shaken. The point of this scripture is not about what we must do, but about what God has done. God has placed Jesus Christ as the one and only foundation of the church.

We are built on him, and because we are built on him, we will not be lost. Whatever comes, we will not be lost. So take heart! Live boldly! Be assured! We will not be lost!