

The Work. Paul emphasizes once more the unity and working together that is to characterize God's workers but then goes on to speak more of the work itself. What is it all about, what quality is expected, what results are expected, and what about this reward business anyway, and what happens if we goof up the job? Another question: what if we work very hard and do very well, but do the wrong job? What do I mean "wrong job"? Well it is possible in the liberty we have been granted by the cross that we may mistakenly find things to do that appear to be good but haven't been given us by the Master. If we go ahead without His prompting we risk doing damage to His purposes rather than advancing them. We may even build with materials that appear to our eyes to be good. But we run the risk of finding later they are not the kind that will stand up under the testing they will be given. For instance, steel beams in the World Trade Center sagged and finally gave way in the intense heat from burning fuel released in the impact of the jet airliners. The materials used for this building were not able to stand the test by fire they were given. They were not designed to withstand fire of that intensity, so they couldn't. In the case of the WTC the designer wasn't expected to anticipate the test it got. But WE have been advised that our work WILL BE TESTED BY FIRE. And we have been given specific instructions on which materials will pass the test and which will not. If we build with gold, silver, and precious stones our work will not perish. If we build with perishable materials like wood hay and stubble the work will perish.

What is portrayed by the various materials mentioned here?

The Imperishable:

Not only highly valued but of intrinsic beauty. Mined from the earth rather than grown on the earth.

Gold: Divinity. The Deity of Christ. He is the glorious, eternal Son of God. Every truth about His Person and character.

Silver: Redemption. The Work of Christ. The finished, accepted work of the Man, Christ Jesus, on the cross to redeem our souls, the nation of Israel, and the whole earth (and creation) to Himself.

Precious Stones: These may speak of two things.

1. The believers, the Living Stones which comprise the House of God, The Temple of the Holy Spirit, the Assembly of God.
2. The adornment of the Temple (and the doctrine). The testimony of the faithful lives and gifted service of the saints. *Titus 2:10 that they may adorn the doctrine of God our Saviour in all things.*

The Perishable:

These all burn, some faster some slower. Each is the product or remains of a thing grown out of the earth. Some are useful for earthly purposes some totally worthless, but all are unsuited for the temple of God. (Moses' Tabernacle and Solomon's Temple both had wood as part of their structures and furnishings but they were earthly temples.)

Wood: Strong and useful for structures, implements, wagons, furniture, fuel, etc. Jesus was a carpenter by trade. But wood probably represents our own works and "good deeds" that were not of faith, that will not survive the flame. It may represent the wisdom, intellect and eloquence of man, the natural gifts and abilities of man used to attract and retain audiences to hear the gospel. The Corinthians were in to that kind of thing.

Romans 14:23 whatsoever [is] not of faith is sin.

Hay: Grass is feed for grazing herds and flocks, beasts but not men. Perhaps it speaks of perishable ideas of men such as self worth/self esteem, "political correctness," evolutionary concepts, etc.

Stubble: Stubble is only good to burn or to plow back into the soil. Worthless sentimental fables such as "the little drummer boy" etc.

Notice the apostle says the works will be destroyed but the worker does not perish. Our salvation doesn't rest upon our works, either what we build or what we build with. This passage is another clear indication of that glorious truth.

Ephesians 2:8 For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: [it is] the gift of God: 9 Not of works, lest any man should boast. 10 For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them.

The designer did not perish in the WTC collapse (although he might have if he had been inside). And he was not punished for the collapse because he used the best accepted practice of the day when he did his work. But he feels terribly because so many perished in the fall of his structure, even though he had done his best to assure its permanence, serviceability and safety. His conscience is clear yet he laments the inadequacy of his design for the test. He was not a prophet nor did he have divine revelation of what lay ahead. **But we do!**

Some buildings do collapse because of shoddy workmanship or incompetent design, poor foundation, etc. The folly (and some times deception and greed of the builders) is exposed by a test, be it earthquake, fire, flood, insects etc.

Build on the rock.

Luke 6:47 Whosoever cometh to me, and heareth

my sayings, and doeth them, I will shew you to whom he is like: 48 He is like a man which built an house, and digged deep, and laid the foundation on a rock: and when the flood arose, the stream beat vehemently upon that house, and could not shake it: for it was founded upon a rock. 49 But he that heareth, and doeth not, is like a man that without a foundation built an house upon the earth; against which the stream did beat vehemently, and immediately it fell; and the ruin of that house was great.

There is a chorus that goes like this:

“Build on the rock, the rock that ever stands,

Oh build on the rock and not upon the sand,

You need not fear the storm or the earthquake’s shock,

You’re safe for evermore if you build on the rock.”

We know that all the works of man on this old earth will at last be devoured in the final judgement and a New Earth and New Heavens will greet the saints in the end.

2Pet 3:10 But the day of the Lord will come... and the works that are therein shall be burned up.

Revelation 21:1 And I saw a new heaven and a new earth: for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away;

Paul historically laid the foundation, we just build upon it. All of the truth has been given, revealed, recorded and preserved for us in scripture. We don’t keep laying it again and again. It is set and sure. It has a seal with two faces.

2 Tim 2:19 19 Nevertheless the foundation of God standeth sure, having this seal, The Lord knoweth them that are his. And, Let every one that nameth the name of Christ depart from iniquity. {sure: or, steady}

We don’t need more apostles today. Their work is completed, the foundation is laid. And it is solid, permanent and sure.

Ephesians 2:20 And are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner [stone]; 21 In whom all the building fitly framed together groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord: 22 In whom ye also are builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit.

Is our work structural or decorative? Are the precious stones jewel stones or costly stone building blocks? They are the large, priceless building stones purchased with the blood of Christ to form the House of God here and now.

1Peter 2:5 Ye also, as lively stones, are built up a spiritual house, an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ. {are: or, be ye} 6 Wherefore also it is contained in the scripture, Behold, I lay in Sion a chief corner stone, elect, precious: and he that believeth on him shall not

be confounded. 7 Unto you therefore which believe [he is] precious: ...

But they are also decorative jewels.

Revelation 21:14 And the wall of the city had twelve Lamb. . . . 19 And the foundations of the wall of the city [foundations, and in them the names of the twelve apostles of the were] garnished with all manner of precious stones.

Do we work for reward? Or out of love and devotion? Will we feel sad in heaven? There is a judgement seat where our works will be judged. Not us, but our works!

Romans 14:10 But why dost thou judge thy brother? or why dost thou set at nought thy brother? for we shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ. 11 For it is written, [As] I live, saith the Lord, every knee shall bow to me, and every tongue shall confess to God. 12 So then every one of us shall give account of himself to God.

2Corinthians 5:9 Wherefore we labour, that, whether present or absent, we may be accepted of him. 10 For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things [done] in [his] body, according to that he hath done, whether [it be] good or bad. 11 Knowing therefore the terror of the Lord, we persuade men; but we are made manifest unto God.

Our loss (ch. 3:15) may be a lesser ability to enjoy greater height and depths of the eternal heavenly blessings promised and awaiting us. It’s not losing something we had but something we never gained. Each of us will be full and overflowing. Our capacity to enter in to heavenly blessings seems to be formed while we are here in this earth. If so, some will have smaller vessels than others. But there will no unhappiness, only total bliss, for we will enjoy and joy to the fullest of our capacity. But, of course, God knows the loss of each from what could have been if we had been more faithful. Perhaps our regrets will be confined to the failure to glorify and serve Him as much as He deserves. We all sense that even now. Paul has more to say about this in chapter 4.

4:4 Therefore judge nothing before the time, until the Lord come, who both will bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and will make manifest the counsels of the hearts: and then shall every man have praise of God.

But Then each shall have our praise from God.

None will be fruitless, none a barren or burnt branch.

None lost once saved! Scripture speaks of snatching some from the fire. Even Lot had some fruit but was literally saved through the fire:

Zechariah 3:1 ... [is] not this a brand plucked out of the fire.

2Peter 2:6 And turning the cities of Sodom and Gomorrha into ashes condemned [them] with an

overthrow, making [them] an ensample unto those that after should live ungodly; 7 And delivered just Lot, vexed with the filthy conversation of the wicked: 8 (For that righteous man dwelling among them, in seeing and hearing, vexed [his] righteous soul from day to day with [their] unlawful deeds;) Jude 21 Keep yourselves in the love of God, looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life. 22 And of some have compassion, making a difference: 23 And others save with fear, pulling [them] out of

the fire; hating even the garment spotted by the flesh. 24 Now unto him that is able to keep you from falling, and to present [you] faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy. 25 To the only wise God our Saviour, [be] glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and ever. Amen.

By Ron Canner, November 20, 2002.