

## Prayers

### To God

Praise You, Lord God Almighty, for Your revelation to me, to Your people, and to the whole earth! I praise You for the wonder and power of Your death and resurrection! I praise You for the love You Have shown to people everywhere! I praise You for the forgiveness You have shown everyone! I praise You for the eternal future You have opened up for us! I thank You, Lord God Almighty, for the glories of the Gospel! AMEN

### For myself

*Weekly theme: generosity*

*Pray for a heart of generosity towards all who do not know the Gospel. Pray earnestly for the courage to speak God's message, in whatever circumstances and to whomsoever it is required.*

### For others

*Ask the Lord God to bless those who work in the caring professions, such as nursing, and providing child care, and much more. Such people are often paid relatively low salaries for professions such as nursing or child care; so pray that these people will themselves be cared for by others, and come to know they are loved as well.*

## Meditation

The glory of God is awesome  
impressive, and beyond our understanding  
for we see in this His entire authoritative command

The glory of God is revealed  
made known through Easter's empty tomb  
for all who believe, the amazing hope of eternal life

The glory of God is essential  
established within the moral core of our world  
for victory over evil is found in Jesus' love on the Cross

The glory of God is prophetic  
certain that the purposes of God will prevail  
for the destiny of our world lies in His truth and love

The glory of God is a mystery  
a wonder that cannot be defined or grasped  
for He has given us a vision, and we are sure of Him

The glory of God is found in Him, and He has more ...

# Bible Passage

## 1 Cor 3:10-23

<sup>10</sup> By the grace of God given to me, I laid a foundation like a master builder, and another continues to build; though each should be careful how he builds. <sup>11</sup> For no-one can lay a foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ. <sup>12</sup> If anyone builds on the foundation using gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay or straw, <sup>13</sup> the work of each one will be shown for what it is, because the Day will disclose it. It will be revealed with fire, and the fire will show what sort of work each has done. <sup>14</sup> If the work someone has built lasts, he will receive his payment. <sup>15</sup> If someone's work is burned up, he will be ruined; now he will be saved, but only as through fire.

<sup>16</sup> Don't you know that you are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in you? <sup>17</sup> If anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy him; for God's temple is holy, and you are that temple.

<sup>18</sup> Do not deceive yourselves. If any one of you thinks you are wise in this age, then you should become 'fools' in order to become wise. <sup>19</sup> For the wisdom of this world is foolishness in God's sight. As it is written: 'He traps the wise in their craftiness'; <sup>20</sup> and again, 'The Lord knows that the thoughts of the wise are worthless.' <sup>21</sup> So then, no more boasting about people! All things are yours, <sup>22</sup> whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas, or the world or life or death, or the present or the future: all are yours, <sup>23</sup> and you are Christ's, and Christ is God's.

## Review

This passage is Paul's collected thoughts on the Church as a building whose foundation stone is Christ. Paul refers briefly to this analogy in a number of places in his writing, notably Ephesians 2:20-22, 1 Timothy 3:15, and 2 Timothy 19,20, but this is the longest and most complete of such passages. It comes after Paul had spoken strongly to the Corinthians about the important work he and Apollos had done in setting up the church there and encouraging it to grow (3:1-9). He begins by mentioning of his own role as the first to preach in Corinth; he is the '*master-builder*', and he clearly regards Apollos as one who has built on his foundations (3:10)!

Yet I do not believe Paul was trying to claim any more than his fair dues; he spoke the truth, and the problem at Corinth was that the spiritual 'egos' of preachers and evangelists there had become inflated and caused all the division we have read about (see 2:14-3:4). Having faced this quite bluntly by telling the Christians of Corinth they were mere spiritual 'babes', Paul now begins to speak more positively about how the church of God needs to be built up. He writes generally, but it is not too difficult to discern Paul's caution about the Corinthian's responsibilities within the church of God.

### ***The importance of cornerstones ...***

To begin with, if we are to understand what Paul says about the church as a building, then we must take care to look at the very different way a building was constructed in ancient times. A quality building such as a temple or a fine house was built using finished stone. This was cut and finished at a quarry and then brought to site, so it was critical that each piece had been prepared correctly. The order, size and definition of each stone and their assembly on site was the responsibility of the 'master builder' who was also responsible to the one who had commissioned the building. This was the 'master builder', the 'architect', though the work done by this person was very different to that of an architect today.

Whilst this master builder had general oversight of the build, he had one very important job, which was to make sure that the very first stone was set correctly on the land, for everything else was set according to this stone. This was the '*foundation stone*' we read of, and when the Bible speaks of foundations, it is not speaking of concrete set into the ground, but this one defining piece of stonework. Although it is not found in this text, it is worth noting here that the very last stone to be put in place was called the 'capstone', and its correct fitting both completed the building and 'proved' the alignment of the whole structure. Some scriptural texts call Christ the 'capstone' (Zech 4:7, 1 Peter 2:7), others the 'cornerstone' (Isaiah 28:16 and Eph 2:20), and some, both (Matt 21:42 quoting Psalm 118:22)!

### ***Being built on Christ***

Clearly, Paul's theology about our salvation in Christ and in Christ alone lends itself to this illustration, and it is not simply a description of the uniqueness of Christian faith, but a good definition of our spiritual unity. For if Paul is right, then all Christians are part of one church built upon Jesus Christ, that is, as far as God sees it. The tragedy is that our churches today mostly do not recognise this, moreover, most seem to believe that they are 'church' in their own right, and some openly say they are the only church built properly on Christ..

At this point we must hear what Scripture says her, as Paul puts it, '*no one can lay a foundation stone other than the one already laid, which is Christ*' (3:11). No one has the right to claim that what is built today is by way of laying a foundation stone which is Christ; the church was started by the preaching of apostles such as Paul in the first century, and though we may start congregations, we never start the church again. God does not do this. Of course, this work of His is spiritual and eternal, and this is why Paul emphasises this in verse 13 to 15. At the last Judgement, the work of all will be revealed, and we will come to know what is of God and what is not. This is a stern challenge, because for the evangelist or apostle, it is linked with their eternal destiny; '*if someone's work is burned up, he will be ruined; now he will be saved, but only as through fire ...*' (43:15)

### **Being God's Temple**

At this point, Paul appeals to an idea that was probably common in the days of the early church. Many Christians of the day watched with horror as the Roman authorities grew impatient with Jewish demands for autonomy, and when things reached their zenith, the Emperor decided the only way to stop this sub ordinance to his authority was to destroy the capital and sacred city of Judaism, Jerusalem. The city was sacked and destroyed utterly along with its Temple in AD70. Yet the church was by then in possession of a radical teaching from the lips of Jesus and brought to them afresh by the apostles. The real Temple was the church of God, and through Jesus and the Holy Spirit (see Matt 23:16f.), God now dwelt with His people, personally and also in their fellowship. The language of this passage reflects exactly this scenario, and it is inspiring!

Though remember, one of the chief accusations against Jesus when he was arraigned, was that he had threatened to bring down the Jerusalem Temple (Matthew 26:61f.). The idea that the church as it grew was God's new temple was a powerful declaration of the Gospel intent that God, through Jesus and the Holy Spirit, is alive within the '*born again*' believer (John 31-24)

### **Wisdom and folly (again!)**

As Paul completes this part of his letter, and as it subtly changes from this theme to those that come next in which Paul attacks bad practice within the church, he returns again to his theme of wisdom and folly. All this about God living with people individually and in the open fellowship, within the 'Temple' of the church, would have seemed like utterly new thinking to people of the first century! No one had ever heard of anything like this before, and the preaching of people like Paul certainly created interest simply because it was so new. Paul often had to defend himself because he was travelling intellectually to parts of the human mind and spirit where people had never been before. So it is natural that we find here some passages of Old Testament Scripture, used to justify what he was saying.

In speaking about the wisdom of God and the folly of human wisdom, he quotes '*he traps the wise in their craftiness*' which comes from Job 5:13, and '*the Lord knows that the thoughts of the wise are foolish*', from Psalm 94:11. As so often, we do not necessarily know the passages used by the N.T. writers, but they are a fascinating guide to the Scriptures which were known and used by Christians in the first century. Both passages come from 'wisdom' literature within the Old Testament, which deal with how God's people handle the problem of sin and evil in their midst. This is a string clue to us as to what is on Paul's mind then. He believes he is confronting the evil that has arisen in the church at Corinth, and he will not back down!

## **Discipleship**

### **Application**

#### **Laying the foundations of the church**

There is much emphasis today on church creation, we call it planting churches, with a nod to the New Testament idea that the work of God is 'sown', as in the parable of the sower. But 'planting churches' is not how the Bible speaks of the church of God. Rather, the dominant idea is that of foundation, of 'building on ... the foundation stone' of Christ. Now some would say all this requires is that the preaching of the Gospel be focussed on salvation and on Christ, and the church that arises from that preaching will be properly founded.

But there is more. To understand this and other similar New Testament scriptures, we should rather have eyes for making sure that what is built continues with what God has already 'founded' in past generations. God's work is consistent throughout the generations, and the questions '*who founded this church*', and '*how do we connect with the wider church*' must be answered by those who wish to make sure the church of God moves forward scripturally without the Gospel diluted by unconnected church growth.

### ***God's Spirit dwelling in us ...***

This wonderful Scripture tells us that the Holy Spirit 'dwells' in us, and the idea is based on two important concepts essential to the presence of the Temple in Jerusalem. The Temple was the place where the glory of God was said to 'abide', that is, to dwell or be in residence. With this in mind, this passage tells us that God's very glory, His 'Holy Spirit' is at residence within us, whether individually or as part of God's people, the church. How wonderful! How marvellous! God counts His people worthy of such a thing!

Yet too many feel that this kind of talk is anathema to their faith; they would rather be people who are 'doing their bit' to the common cause of religion and accepting the few small benefits of grace that come their way. How can the church today life people out of such faithlessness? My own view is that it will come only through the reading of Scripture and prayer on the part of God's faithful.

### ***Ideas for what to do***

- *Write down a list of points you have found within this passage, which say something about the nature of the church. Write a separate list of what this says about individual Christians. How are the two connected?*
- *Look up the 'Temple' using a concordance of the Bible or any other search engine you can use on the internet or in your personal library of books or software. How does this help you understand this passage?*

### ***Questions (for use in groups)***

1. *What are the foundations of the church to which you belong, and how does it connect, in reality, to the church of the first century AD?*
2. *What does being 'God's Temple' mean to you, and what should it mean to you? Are such views held generally within the church?*
3. *How can we become wise through foolishness? Or are we destined to be fools for life in order to find the wisdom of salvation? Discuss.*

## **Final Prayer**

Lord Jesus Christ; You know the truth about how the church will develop, and we are doing our best to follow You in being Your people, placed to do the work that will bring this growth. Keep us close to You, therefore, and help us surrender ourselves completely to this great task. We ask this in Jesus' name. **AMEN**