



"Religion and good morals are the only solid foundation of public liberty and happiness."
—Samuel Adams

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Building on a Perfect Foundation

As we all know, a foundation plays an essential role in the construction and preservation of a building. One look at the Leaning Tower of Pisa, the freestanding bell tower of the Pisa Cathedral, and it is evident that its foundation is faulty. In fact, the infamous tilt to the tower is an original feature; it became apparent during its construction in the late twelfth century. Builders laid an inadequate foundation on ground too soft on one side to support the tower's prodigious weight. After some intensive stabilization work, the tower has been "straightened" so that it now stands only 12'10" from the vertical (it had been 17' off-kilter).

A firm foundation is vital in Christianity as well. The apostle Paul instructs in [Ephesians 2:20](#) that God's church has "been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, [Jesus Christ](#) Himself being the chief cornerstone." Our foundation is perfect if we have indeed based our belief and behaviors on our sure and solid Savior.

And there is the rub: Many hear or read God's Word and think that they believe what they have learned, professing to be a Christian. Jesus says in [Matthew 7:21-23](#) that many say to Him, "Lord, Lord," as if in acclaim and

submission, but they never actually follow Him. He illustrates this failure in His parable about the wise and foolish builders:

Whoever comes to Me, and hears My sayings and does them, I will show you whom he is like: He is like a man building a house, who dug deep and laid the foundation on the rock. And when the flood arose, the stream beat vehemently against that house, and could not shake it, for it was founded on the rock. But he who heard and did nothing is like a man who built a house on the earth without a foundation, against which the stream beat vehemently; and immediately it fell. And the ruin of that house was great. ([Luke 6: 47-49](#))

Jesus tells us plainly that both of these house-builders hear the Word of [God](#). That is, both of them have access to the knowledge of the way of life that leads to salvation. However, only one of them—the wiser of the two—does something with that knowledge. It is not just interesting information that he can file away. No, he acts upon it, and his life changes. He takes God at His Word and uses the principles of life he has heard. He keeps the commandments, he loves his neighbor, he gives of himself to others. These actions make him rock-solid and immovable like the Savior after whom he has modeled his life. Because he has lived God's way of life—proven it through experience—he knows it is the only right way.

The other man, the foolish one, reacts differently. He has heard the same instruction that the wiser man has, but his knowledge is intellectual. He may believe what he has heard, but he never sees any need to follow through or act on it. He never digs deep and anchors his learning on practical experience with God's way. He knows it would probably work, but he never proves to himself that God's way will work by doing it.

What is remarkable is that in good times, observers would have a difficult time telling the difference between these two men. When the sun is shining, they both look like upstanding Christians, stable members of the church. Only when troublesome times come—a storm of hard rains and strong winds—can anyone tell who is firmly anchored in the Rock, Christ ([1 Corinthians 10:4](#)).

Note Jesus' description of the result of the storm: "Immediately" the foolish man's house fell. The floodwaters swept away the underpinnings of his life, and he was spiritually ruined. Conversely, the wise man's house, being founded on the truth and hardened by experience, withstood the trials and tests hurled at it. He could tell right from wrong, truth from error, fact from fiction, because he had been living it.

Jesus designed this parable to make us think deeply about *where* or *on what* we build our Christian lives, the bedrock foundation of Christ. That decision is certainly the vital first step of the process of being created in the image of Jesus Christ. Later, in [1 Corinthians 3:10-13](#), Paul urges us to contemplate *how* we build on that foundation:

According to the grace of God which was given to me, as a wise master builder I have laid the foundation, and another builds on it. But let each one take heed how he builds on it. For no other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. Now if anyone builds on this foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw, each one's work will become clear; for the Day will declare it, because it will be revealed by fire; and the fire will test each one's work, of what sort it is.

Our faithful teachers in the [faith](#) lay the foundation, and Paul repeats that the foundation is Christ—any other type of foundation is like no foundation at all. After the foundation is laid (as he writes in [Hebrews 6:1](#), "not laying again the foundation"), we have the responsibility to "go on to perfection." This phrase describes the same process as "building on the foundation." Christians are not to remain static on the foundation but to use their time, talents, and energies to make something more of themselves.

Understandably, we all have different abilities, intellects, gifts, talents, and situations. We do not all build on our foundation in the same manner or with the same materials. Aware of these realities, God considers such things in His judgment of us.

However, He does test everyone's work, the "building" we construct. He wants to see if we have anchored it in the Rock. He sends winds and water and fire and earthquake to see if it will stand. Why? He has standards! He

desires a strong temple that will stand steadfast and unmovable for eternity! Thus, the apostle cautions us to be careful about how we build on the foundation given to us. With foresight and attention to detail, we must be prepared for the inevitable trials by building with thoughtfulness and the sound principles of God's Word.

So what do we do? How do we build on the foundation? A detailed answer would take many essays, but Paul provides an overall answer in his explanation of the ministry's work: ". . . for the equipping of the saints, . . . for the edifying [building up] of the body of Christ, till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ" ([Ephesians 4:12-13](#)). In other words, we keep on learning and living God's way with the goal of transforming into the very character image of our Savior. The apostle John puts it more simply: "He who says he abides in Him ought himself also to walk just as He walked" ([I John 2:6](#)).

It all starts with the right foundation.

- Richard T. Ritenbaugh

From the Archives: Featured Sermon

[Building on the Foundation](#)

by Richard T. Ritenbaugh

Considerable effort must be expended to find suitable bedrock for use as a foundation. Until this bedrock is found, no progress can be made. As Christians, we must build on the proper foundation—the bedrock symbolized by Jesus Christ. Christ constitutes the keystone, supporting the two sides of the foundation (the prophets and the apostles). As living stones of a spiritual Temple, we contribute to the overall structure of this building. Building upon bedrock consists of 1) accepting Christ as Lord, 2) hearing what He says, and most importantly, 3) putting these words into practice—doing as well as hearing, applying godly wisdom to daily behavior. We need to be extremely careful how we build on this sure foundation, using quality construction

materials—having beauty, value, and durability—and increasing in value as heat and pressure are applied.

From the Archives: Featured Article

[Seeking God \(Part Two\): A Foundation](#)

by John W. Ritenbaugh

Having a goal is a wonderful thing, but it is worthless without a plan for achieving it. John Ritenbaugh contends that Christians also need to have a conscious plan in seeking God, recommending several essential qualities that must be included in any successful course of action.

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